CINEMA'S SPECTRAL SOUNDS:
MEMORY, HISTORY & POLITICS

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Abstract

Expanding on Robert Stam's idea that sound and image tracks in film can 'mutually jostle, undercut [and] haunt...each other' creating what he calls a 'heterochronic... cinema'[1], this thesis argues that close analysis of a film's sound design can sometimes reveal a break in the seamlessness of a film's narrative and formal structure when sound and image are used asynchronously. Synthesising Stam's formal approach with the theoretical framework of temporal critique put forward by Bliss Cua Lim in her study of the ghost film, this study demonstrates how, like the ghost figure, this use of 'unruly' sound can similarly disrupt the concept of time as linear and the nation-state as a stable, homogenous entity. Analysing the use of 'spectral sound' in a group of important films produced in cultures of censorship by Bahman Ghobadi, Jia Zhangke and Apichatpong Weerasethakul, the thesis argues that film form can itself be political – creating a sense of temporal dislocation that 'makes the present waver'.[2] Alert to the ethical possibilities of listening to film, 'Cinema's Spectral Sounds' argues that film sound can also play a crucial *restorative* role in that it can reposition oppressed memories and experiences centrally within the discourse of the present.

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[1] Robert Stam, 'Beyond Third Cinema: The Aesthetics of Hybridity' in Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.) *Rethinking Third Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 38.
[2] Frederic Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter' in Michael Sprinkler (ed.) *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 38.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Cinema's Spectral Sounds: Memory, History & Politics

> [T]o learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly….this being-with spectres would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations.[3]

In the last few years, there seems to have been an increasing fascination with the nature of time and the motif of haunting in Asian cinema. Authors such as Bliss Cua Lim, Jean Ma, Jason McGrath, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar have all explored how films can offer a critique of the dominant conception of time as homogenous and linear.[4] Cua Lim writes for example that while 'the cinema, like habitual perception, reduces time to the homogeneity of measurable space…[becoming]… a clock for seeing, an apparatus that links vision to rationalized time [this] is only one aspect of the cinema's relationship to temporality.'[5] Asserting that 'fantastic narratives …[unhinge] the unicity of the present by insisting on the survival of the past or the jarring coexistence of other times,'[6] she offers a way of thinking about cinematic temporality that is concerned with ethics and a Derridean sense of historical accountability.

As Cua Lim argues that the cinematic apparatus 'links *vision* to rationalized time', I am curious about the role that sound can play in film in terms of how (like the ghost narrative) it might similarly be able to create a sense of the 'jarring

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[3] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xviii.

[4] See Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009); Jean Ma, *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010); Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008); Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China On Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York and West Sussex, 2006), particularly the chapter entitled: 'Time and the National: History, Historiology, Haunting', pp. 17 – 46, and Chris Berry, '*Xiao Wu*: Watching Time Go By' in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, Chris Berry (ed.) (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 250-257. See also Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Karen Lury, *The Child in Film: Tear, Fears and Fairy Tales* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

[5] Bliss Cua Lim, op. cit., p. 11.

[6] ibid.

coexistence of other times.'[7] Jean-Luc Nancy contends that 'the sonorous…outweighs form. It does not dissolve it, but rather enlarges it; it gives it an amplitude.'[8] The thesis starts from the premise then that *sound can amplify meaning*. Rather than merely slavishly attending to the image, by creating a perceptible break in the seamlessness of a film's narrative and formal structure, sound can be an unruly force in its own right, acting like a mischievous or even belligerent ghost that exposes the progress narrative's conception of homogenous, linear time as a myth.

Robert Stam has also identified this 'unruly' potential of sound in cinema in his essay 'Beyond Third Cinema: The Aesthetics of Hybridity', in which he argues that the 'multi-track' nature of film enables it 'to orchestrate multiple, even contradictory, histories, temporalities, and perspectives'. He writes:

> The cinema makes it possible to stage temporalized cultural contradictions…through the interplay … between the diverse tracks, which can mutually jostle, undercut, haunt and relativize each other. Each track can develop its own velocity; the image can be accelerated while the music is slowed, or the soundtrack can be temporally layered by references to diverse historical periods. A culturally polyrhythmic, heterochronic, multiple-velocity and contrapuntal cinema becomes a real possibility.[9]

Here Stam provides us with not just a description of film form, but with a methodology through which we can open up an understanding of the politics embedded in film form itself. This thesis is driven by a curiosity about how the conception of time as linear and the nation-state as a stable, homogenous entity, privileged in cultures of censorship such as Iran, China, and Thailand (and in many other cultural contexts, including some Western democracies), is destabilised in film through these temporal 'contradictions', which seem to articulate something of the complexity of the relationship between memory and official history. Drawing on Stam's methodology, I analyse a small number of important films produced in each of these countries by the directors Bahman Ghobadi, Jia Zhangke and Apichatpong

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[7] ibid.

[8] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), p. 2.

[9] Robert Stam, 'Beyond Third Cinema: The Aesthetics of Hybridity' in Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), *Rethinking Third Cinema* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 38.

Weerasethakul respectively. Attentive to the social, historical and political contexts of each of these bodies of work, I explore their different uses of sound to investigate how the films reconceptualise lived space-time as 'heterochronic' (in the sense that they recognise time as multiple and divergent) both formally through the disjunctive use of sound and image, and thematically through their exploration of the heterogeneity of subjective and/or cultural memory. In doing so, I hope to be able to provide a useful analytical framework that can be productively mapped onto different cultural and historical contexts.

Throughout this study, I make a connection between the symbolic function of sound as an 'unruly' presence and the notion of filmmaking as a politically disruptive force. Drawing on recent scholarship concerned with ethics and spectatorship, I also suggest how the act of *listening* to film might also be understood politically. This introductory chapter is organised around these different, but overlapping strands – firstly, outlining the theoretical framework on which the thesis draws and secondly, the historical and industrial contexts for each of the filmmakers' work – drawing out some of the parallels between them. As well as sound theory, the thesis draws on three main areas of thought, which I shall now outline: History and Time; Cinema and the Nation-state; and Memory and Trauma.

History and Time

> If Benjamin said that history had hitherto been written from the standpoint of the victor, and needed to be written from that of the vanquished, we might add that knowledge must indeed present the fatally rectilinear succession of victory and defeat, but should also address itself to those things which were not embraced by this dynamic, which fell by the wayside – what might be called the waste products and blind spots that have escaped the dialectic.
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> Theodor W. Adorno[10]

Although none of the films in this study should be considered 'history films' in the sense put forward by Robert Rosenstone and Marcia Landy, amongst others in that

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[10] Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 151.

they do not directly address what might be considered significant historical 'events', the socio-historical contexts of the films' settings provide an important framework against which they can be analysed.[11] As if in response to the words of Adorno above, the films foreground the experiences of those on the social and political margins – privileging that which 'falls by the wayside' of the linear trajectory of official discourse. Because of this sense of being, in Adorno's terms, 'left behind', writing on time and, more specifically, theories of temporal critique, have significantly influenced my approach.

As Harry Harootunian describes in his essay, 'Remembering the Historical Present', in the early twentieth century a philosophical debate described by Heidegger as a 'reckoning with time' took place, sparked by new experiences of space-time in modern Western society brought about by technological innovations and scientific discoveries in which capitalism came to be governed by calendrical and clock time. While the approaches of these philosophers of time (including Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Georg Simmel and Georg Lukács) differ in important ways, Harootunian contends that 'what seemed to hold this discussion together was the effort to rescue qualitative time and to evaluate the status of immediate experience.'[12] Reinhart Koselleck's theories of temporality grew out of this debate, and in his *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (influenced in particular by Heidegger's *Being and Time*), he puts forward the notion of the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous' and the idea that the chronological past is connected to both the present and future, each being mutually implicated with the other.[13] Questions of justice and historical accountability that have important resonance for

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[11] There has been a wealth of books published specifically on the relationship between film and history in recent years. These include Marcia Landy's edited collection *The Historical Film: History and Film in Media* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001) and her *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) as well as more recently, Robert A. Rosenstone's *History on Film/Film on History* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2006), William Guynn's *Writing History on Film* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006) and Marnie Hughes-Warrington's *History Goes to the Movies: Studying History on Film* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007). See also Vivian Sobchack's edited collection *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). For an interesting discussion of the role of avant-garde cinema in depicting history see Jeffrey Skoller, *Shadows, Specters, Shards: Making History in Avant-Garde Film* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[12] Harry Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Spring 2007), p. 479.

[13] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, translated by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

films produced in cultures of censorship are bound up with this understanding of time, and throughout this study I will attempt to demonstrate how temporal critique manifests itself in the films as I keep in mind Stam's formal approach as both a methodology and a metaphor.

Cinema and the Nation-State

The films in this study all have an ambiguous, even problematic relationship to the nation-state for a number of reasons. One important aspect of this relates to the notion of simultaneity. In Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, he argues that the modern experience of simultaneity was brought about when individuals within a particular society became connected through daily activities such as reading newspapers.[14] Yet as Harootunian notes, the societies that Anderson identifies as imaginary communities (and possibly also Anderson's conception of them) 'overlook precisely the multiple times that people…must daily negotiate' that 'keep them divided, a condition national time simply cannot overcome at the level of everyday life.'[15] This tension is identified by Cua Lim as being fundamental to her approach in *Translating Time.* The national does inform her analysis of the films (which focuses, for example, on the horror genre in Hong Kong and the Philippines); but because of the nation's dependency on 'imaginary coherences' that are both 'cultural and temporal', she sees her method of temporal critique as 'sit[ting] uneasily' within this framework. As she argues,

> The fiction of a homogenous national culture is founded on the ascendancy of homogenous time. 'Nation' depends on the fiction of calendrical coincidence, a shared, simultaneous present in which all citizens live and move, even as it is haunted by stubborn temporal paradoxes: the modernity of the nation as a political form vis-à-vis claims that the nation has always existed, merely conferring a new name for a community rooted in immemorial antiquity. [16]

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[14] See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).
[15] Harry Harootunian, 'Remembering the Historical Present', op. cit., p. 475.
[16] Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time*, p. 34.

For Cua Lim, then, a theory of cinema grounded in temporal critique cannot unproblematically adopt the 'nation' as its organising category because 'a linear national present is precisely what splinters when… ghosts return.'[17] In this important study, Cua Lim draws on Walter Benjamin, Bergson, and Koselleck to suggest that ghost narratives open up the possibility for a 'radicalized concept of noncontemporaneity' as they disturb the concept of time as a universal linear progression by bringing people and events from the past into the present. This, she argues, troubles 'the boundaries of past, present and future' thus providing 'old concerns…[with]… a new urgency and relevance.'[18] Following Derrida's discussion of justice as 'being-with spectres' and Benjamin's notion of the present's accountability to an oppressed past, Cua Lim insists that a society's capacity 'to be' with spectres is 'at the core of ethical politics.'[19]

Debates around national cinemas have been re-energised in recent years with the publication of a number of monographs and edited collections on the subject, including: Mette Hjort and Scott McKenzie's *Cinema and Nation* (2000), Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen's *Theorising National Cinema* (2006) and Hjort and Duncan Petrie's *The Cinema of Small Nations* (2007), as well as a proliferation of publications devoted to the national cinemas of individual countries. In addition to this scholarship however, scepticism about the continued usefulness of the 'national' as a framework has led to further work focussing on the post- and/or trans-national, such as the edited collections: Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort's *The Postnational Self* (2002); Elizabeth Ezra's *Transnational Cinema: the Film Reader* (2005); Natasa Durovicová and Kathleen E. Newman's *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (2009); and most recently, Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover's *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (2010) – all of which attempt to theorise cinema beyond the framework of the nation-state.

Since the publication of his 1989 *Screen* article, 'The Concept of National Cinema', Andrew Higson has remained a key voice in the debate around national

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Bliss Cua Lim, 'Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory', p.287
[19] ibid., p.318

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cinema. In particular, his essay 'The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema' is an important example of this shift towards the transnational in that it reflects on his earlier piece in order to 'reconsider the traditional idea of the 'national' as a self-contained and carefully demarcated experience.'[20] In this essay, Higson questions the usefulness of the nation as a framework through which to analyse film and suggests that the national 'label' is abstract and reductive – 'fetishising the national rather than…describing it.'[21] As a result, he argues, a purely national approach can put up imaginary boundaries between works produced in different nation-states when a comparative transnational lens could be both more productive and illuminating. The problem that Higson and others identify with the post-Anderson (1983) formulation of the nation as a contained, homogenous stable entity maintained by communities with a shared sense of identity and belonging is that in fractured modern societies this sense of seamless commonality simply no longer exists (if, indeed, it ever did). That is not to say that feelings of belonging do not occur, but that these tend to be bound by 'local' connections founded on shared experiences of diaspora, work, class and/or gender and/or sexuality.

Furthering this debate, Thomas Elsaesser argues that national cinemas often function 'around [a] polarization – what one might call an 'official' cinema and an 'unofficial cinema, a respectable cinema and a disreputable one.'[22] This observation has important significance for the films I discuss in this thesis. As I shall describe in more detail later, all three of the directors in this study have had their work subjected to political censorship, and all three have subsequently been active in campaigning for the 'democratisation' of filmmaking within their respective film cultures. Furthermore, the restrictions placed on these filmmakers, and the withholding of their work from domestic audiences, has obvious implications for the status of the work as part of a national cinema.[23]

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[20] Andrew Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen*, 30.4 (1989), p. 64
[21] Ibid.
[22] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Images for Sale: the 'New' British Cinema' in Lester Friedman (ed.), *British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 64.
[23] As all three filmmakers have also received considerable attention at international art house festivals winning between them a string of awards and (in the case of Apichatpong Weerasethakul in particular) demonstrate aesthetic influences from other parts of the world, the case could easily be made for these directors to be seen as transnational auteurs.

Cinema, Memory and Trauma

> There's a battle for and around history going on at this very moment…the intention is to programme, to stifle what I've called 'popular memory'; and also to propose and impose on people a framework in which to interpret the present.
>
> – Michel Foucault[24]

Connections that are forged through 'local' as opposed to national commonalities are often described in terms of shared memories – cultural, and sometimes, personal memories, that stand in opposition to the official historiographies of the nation. The role of memory as counter-discourse is therefore another important strand of this thesis. Susannah Radstone has argued that as history has become 'negatively associated with the authority of master narratives', memory by contrast has become 'positively associated with the embedded, the local, the personal and the subjective.' It thus has become a 'rich source', she contends, 'for those seeking alternatives to dominant versions of the past.'[25] According to Andreas Huyssen in his 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia', this 'culture of memory' or 'memory boom' began in the West in the 1960s and reflected a perceived need for revisionist histories that has since spread across the globe and been mobilised for different political ends – both progressive and conservative. With the former, in countries such as Argentina and Chile, he argues, these attempts to create 'public spheres of real memory' try to counter the politics of forgetting pursued by post-dictatorship regimes either as part of processes of 'reconciliation…official amnesties or through repressive silencing.'[26] Importantly, as Huyssen notes, this use of memory raises 'fundamental questions about human rights violations, justice, and collective responsibility.'[27] In the contexts of Iran, China, and Thailand, where memories of historic acts of state violence have, *and continue to be* silenced by authoritarian regimes, what Huyssen describes as 'wounds inflicted in the past' are not only left

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[24] Michel Foucault, 'Interview', *Edinburgh '77 Magazine*, p. 24 cited in Keith Tribe, 'History and the Production of Memories', *Screen,* 18.4 (1977), p. 13.
[25] Susannah Radstone 'Screening Trauma: *Forrest Gump*, Film and Memory' in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000), p. 84.
[26] Andreas Huyssen 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia', *Public Culture*, 12.1 (2000), p. 26.
[27] Ibid., p. 24.

raw, but are repeatedly *re-opened* as incidents of both symbolic and real violence recur in cyclical repetitions of past abuses – producing new memories that, like the old, are silenced by the dominant discourse. Huyssen notes that memory is 'no substitute for justice.'[28] But as Derrida tells us, without it, justice can never even become a possibility.

In Iran, China and Thailand, memory discourses linked to 'democratization and struggles for human rights' are habitually suppressed through restrictions on freedom of speech. Rather than leading to the 'expansion and strengthening of the public spheres of civil society', acts of deliberate 'forgetting' have closed these spheres down – or, at the very least, made them narrower as public debate has been suppressed. As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone write in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, in cases such as these 'the focus of contestation…is very often not conflicting accounts of what actually happened in the past so much as the question of who or what is entitled to speak for that past in the present.'[29] Memory is thus, as Raphael Samuel contends, 'dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some kind of negative other to it.'[30] However, this is where the 'problem' of the nation recurs. While, as Huyssen notes, it might be tempting to make transnational connections between the diverse experiences of individual nation-states as these experiences may appear to cross national boundaries, 'the *political* site of memory practices is still national, not postnational or global.'[31] As he writes, 'while memory discourses appear to be global in one register, in their core they remain tied to the histories of specific nations and states.'[32]

However, while this may be so, Huyssen also asserts that older approaches to the study of collective memory that rely on the conception of the nation as a fairly stable entity (such as in the work of Maurice Halbwachs[33]) fall short when faced with

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[28] Ibid., p. 37.

[29] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 1.

[30] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. 1 'Past and Present in Contemporary Culture' (London: Verso, 1994), p. x cited in Carrie Hamilton, 'Memories of Violence Among Basque Women' in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 130.

[31] Huyssen, 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia', op. cit., p. 26.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992).

cultures in which fragmentation and marginalisation are widely experienced. This is certainly the case with the films of Bahman Ghobadi, Jia Zhangke and Apichatpong Weerasethakul, whose work focuses on the memories and experiences of individuals on the social and political margins – occupying a time 'out of joint' with what Benjamin saw as the homogenous, 'future-oriented' temporality of the nation-state. The theoretical framework of this thesis, with regard to memory and history, was therefore, initially developed less from the context of either the 'national' or the 'transnational', but from the body of work that began to emerge in the early 2000s that focussed on films and visual media dealing with experiences of liminality and postcolonialism. Key texts in this respect were Laura U. Marks' *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000) and Hamid Naficy's *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001).

Cinema's relationship to memory has also received a vast amount of critical attention in recent years, reflecting Huyssen's 'memory boom'. Examples include Pam Cook's *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in the Cinema* (2004); Damian Sutton's *Photography, Cinema, Memory: The Crystal Image of Time* (2009) and Russell J.A. Kilbourn's *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema* (2010), as well as a number of essays and shorter studies on individual works.[34] Much of this writing has focussed on the image and how, through editing, cinema can replicate the subjective experience of remembering. Susannah Radstone writes, for example, that 'the visuality of cinema shares much with memory's images of the past. Mainstream cinema's editing strategies – such as the fade in and the fade out – are often motivated from the narrative point of view of a protagonist's act of memory', while the use of non-linear

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[34] Interestingly, memory also seems to be at the core of several new publications that focus on emerging national cinemas including Asuman Suner's *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity, and Memory* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010), and Nurith Gertz and George Khleifi's *Palestinian Cinema: Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). For examples of essay length studies see Annette Kuhn, 'Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performance of Memory in and with Visual Media', *Memory Studies* 3.4 (2010), pp. 298 – 313 and Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 325 – 342.

narratives in art cinema, she argues, 'may knowingly evoke the visual (and aural) associations of memory's tropes' through formal strategies such as the flash back.'[35]

Several important studies have also looked at the relationship between cinema and memory with regards to trauma. In addition to Radstone's essay cited above, these include Maureen Turim's *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History*, and her essay 'The Trauma of History: Flashbacks upon Flashbacks'; Thomas Elsaesser's essay 'Postmodernism as mourning work, and Janet Walker's 'The Trauma Paradox', which have all discussed what they consider to be cinema's unparalleled ability to describe the 'unspeakable.'[36] According to Janet Walker for example, 'trauma films'

> complicate the reliability of historical memory and material documentation by way of other qualities of memory, including repression, silence, ellipses, and elaboration…[T]hese texts are traumatized. Their components exist in an 'altered and exaggerated state'; chronological linearity has been broken; the texts are fragmented, marked by repetition, and centered on events that they simultaneously call attention to and deflect attention from.[37]

In terms of this thesis, while the representation of trauma is only directly explored in the way Walker describes in the films of Bahman Ghobadi, the films I discuss by Jia Zhangke and Apichatpong Weerasethakul are also set against a backdrop of historical trauma and political violence. The concept of bearing witness can therefore be traced throughout the films and my analysis of them, as I focus on the act of listening. Roger Hallas and Frances Guerin note in their introduction to *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* that '[t]he act of bearing witness … constitutes a specific form of address to an other. It occurs only in a framework of relationality, in which the testimonial act is itself witnessed by an other.'[38] For film, this 'framework of relationality' suggests an ethical dimension to

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[35] Susannah Radstone, 'Screening Trauma: *Forrest Gump*, Film and Memory', Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology*, op. cit., p. 81.

[36] Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989) pp. 231 – 245; Maureen Turim, 'The Trauma of History: Flashbacks upon Flashbacks' *Screen,* 42.2 (Summer 2001), p. 207; Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen* 42.2 (Summer 2001), pp. 193 – 201, and Janet Walker, 'The Trauma Paradox' in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 104 – 119.

[37] Janet Walker, 'The Trauma Paradox', op. cit., p. 111.

[38] Roger Hallas and Frances Guerin (eds.), *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 10.

spectatorship that I argue is enabled in these films through their use of sound. Paralleling the relationship between speaker and listener described by Hallas and Guerin above, in the chapters that follow I demonstrate how the films' sound design encourages a sense of intersubjectivity between the filmic space and the audio-viewer – as sound itself becomes a 'performative speech-act'.[39]

Listening to Film

There has been a surge of interest in film sound studies in recent years, made evident by the number of anthologies, monographs, articles, and journals published that focus on the use of sound in film. Much of this valuable research draws on the work of Michel Chion, and the importance of his contribution to the field, in terms of providing analytical tools and vocabulary to facilitate a deeper understanding of how films use sound, and to what effect, is indisputable.[40] However, this thesis moves in a slightly different direction, incorporating a number of interdisciplinary sound studies perspectives – drawing, in particular, on the work of sound theorists such as Steven Feld, Jacques Attali, R. Murray Schafer, Alain Corbin, Emily Thompson, Brandon LaBelle and Pierre Schaeffer as well as the existing (and ever growing) body of work on film sound theory, in the hope that this will offer new insights into the

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[39] Ibid.

[40] See *Michel Chion, Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen,* trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2004); Michel Chion, *Sound: A Film Art,* trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) and Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema,* trans. by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). In addition to Chion's work, key texts on film sound (as opposed to music in film) include: Elizabeth Weis and John Belton (eds.), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); Rick Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory, Sound Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (eds.), *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008), and most recently, Andy Birtwistle, *Cinesonica: Sounding Film and Video* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010) and Mark Kerins, *Beyond Dolby (Stereo): Cinema in the Digital Sound Age* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011). Other important publications focus on the use of sound in specific genres, including: William Whittington, *Sound Design and Science Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) and Philip Hayward (ed.), *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema* (London: Equinox, 2009). In addition to this, three journals that are devoted to the study of sound and the moving image have recently been founded: *Music, Sound and the Moving Image*; *The Soundtrack*; *The New Soundtrack* and *Screen Sound: The Australasian Journal of Soundtrack Studies.* There have also been a small number of themed academic conferences recently on the subject including *Screen*: Sound and Music in Film, Television and Video' (2008) and NECS: 'Sonic Futures: Soundscapes and the Languages of Screen Media' (2011).

expressive possibilities of film sound. To begin with, however, I turn back to some of the earliest writing on film sound in the work of Soviet film theorists and directors, Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, where I find arguments about the use of nonsynchronism of sound and image in film similar to my own.

In their 'Statement on Sound', the Soviets stress the importance of nonsynchronisation between sound and image in heightening film's expressive power, adding meaning through juxtaposition.[41] In his 1929 essay, 'Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film', Pudovkin expands on this idea as he argues that

> [t]he role which sound is to play in film is much more significant than a slavish imitation of naturalism on these lines; the first function of sound is to *augment the potential expressiveness of the film's content….* It is clear that this deeper insight into the content of the film cannot be given to the spectator simply by adding an accompaniment of naturalistic sound; we must do something more. This something more is the development of the image and the sound strip each along a separate rhythmic course. They must not be tied to one another by naturalistic imitation but connected as the result of the interplay of action.[42]

Like Stam's description of sound and image 'haunting' each other, then, Pudovkin stresses the importance of form itself for thinking about how films produce meaning. Pudovkin's suggestion that sound and image tracks have distinct 'rhythmic course[s]' draws attention to film's ability to express something of the complexity of the human experience – articulating both objective and subjective experiences concurrently. In each of the chapters that follow, I explore the interplay between these different rhythms – suggesting ways in which they might relate both symbolically and literally to temporality and memory.

As I indicated earlier, in addition to exploring the films' different uses of sound in purely formal terms, this study is also concerned with how the act of listening (as opposed to merely 'viewing') might transform our relationship to film by fostering a sense of empathy and intersubjectivity while maintaining respect for

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[41] See Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov, 'Statement on Sound,' in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (eds.), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 84 – 85.

[42] V. I. Pudovkin, 'Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film' in Weis and Belton (eds.), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice*, p. 86.

alterity. Brandon LaBelle suggests in *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*
that '[t]heories of listening are often based on the notion of diffused subjectivity:
through listening, an individual is extended beyond the boundaries of singularity…
toward a broader space necessarily multiple.' [43] This idea, I argue, has powerful
resonance for the study of cinema and ethics – particularly when imagined through
the framework of testimony and the relationship of listener-witness. By thinking of
spectatorship in these terms – 'beyond the boundaries of singularity', I am reminded
of Derrida's call to 'learn to live…in the conversation, the company, or the
companionship of ghosts'. [44] This 'politics of memory' is bound up with questions of
'inheritance' – crucially, the *passing on* of knowledge from one to another – that
might otherwise be lost to history.

     As Alison Landsberg describes in *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of*
American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas
puts forward the idea of an ethical relation to the other that does not attempt to
achieve a sense of 'totality or unity', but rather foregrounds 'plurality' and
difference. As Levinas himself writes, 'The relationship with the other is not an idyllic
and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put
ourselves in the other's place; we recognise the other as resembling us, but exterior
to us.'**[45]** Levinas' assertion of difference here has important significance in relation to
ideas of cinematic spectatorship. This relationship is discussed further in Chapter
Two in my analysis of the use of sound in the films of Bahman Ghobadi, but also has
resonance across the thesis as a whole. An ethical spectatorship based on empathy
and closeness that also acknowledges alterity marks a significant move away from
psychoanalytic theories of identification that have, until recently, dominated film
studies (such as found in the work of Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz and Laura
Mulvey), towards an awareness of spectatorship as embodied. Connecting point-of-
view with psychoanalytic theory – specifically, Lacan's 'mirror phase' – not only do

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[43] Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*, (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), p. 245.
[44] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and*
the New International, translated by Peggy Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xviii.
[45] Emmanuel Levinas, cited by Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of American*
Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 151. See
also Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis
(Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 1991).

these approaches seem to focus almost exclusively on the image, they also tend to describe spectatorial engagement in negative terms, arguing that this process creates illusions of empowerment.[46] In recent years, however, this way of thinking about spectatorship has been criticised for a number of different reasons that have been widely discussed elsewhere. For my purposes, however, what is most striking about them is their lack of engagement with film sound. Neglecting sound means that they fail to address the many different ways that the spectator or audio-viewer connects with, and responds to, film texts. Shifting the focus from the image to sound – and in particular to the interplay of sound and image, I argue – significantly enriches our understanding of film's potential to make meaning and allows us to consider spectatorship in much more positive, potentially progressive, terms.

More recent theories of spectatorship then, such as Alison Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory* and Lisa Cartwright's study of affect and sound in *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*, have attempted to refocus questions of identification in terms of an ethical engagement with film texts based on empathy.[47] As Landsberg asserts, 'any ethical relationship to the other requires empathy', which, following Levinas, she defines as 'a recognition of the profound difference and unknowability of the other, and a simultaneous sense of commitment and responsibility toward him/her even in the face of such differences.'[48] These approaches have been influential in shaping my own thinking in relation to ethical spectatorship, which at its core is concerned with the intersubjective dynamics of the listener-witness relationship of testimony.

In contrast to earlier 'visually orientated' models of spectatorship, then, this study focuses on the role of sound and listening in the formation of an ethical spectatorship. In particular, it explores the relationship between sound and intersubjectivity, and the way that certain recording methods and uses of rhythm in

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[46] See Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus' *Film Quarterly*, 27.2 (1974-75), pp. 39 - 47; Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen*, 16.2 (Summer, 1975), pp. 14 – 76, and Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 6 – 18.
[47] See Lisa Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 2.
[48] Alison Landsberg, 'Prosthetic Memory: The Ethics and Politics of Memory in an Age of Mass Culture' in Paul Grainge (ed.), *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 147.

the films' scores or diegetic soundscapes create a feeling of intimacy and closeness

through their appeal to the audio-viewer's embodied self. LaBelle argues that

listening makes permeable the boundary between self and other partly because of

its close relationship to touch and the way its presence is felt on and through the

body – according to the laws of physiology, a sound wave only becomes a sound

when it reaches and vibrates the bones in the inner ear.[49] It is perhaps this intimate

connection of sound to our bodies, this thesis suggests, that makes it particularly

able to create a sense of commonality and sensory exchange in cinema.

Phenomenology has been hugely influential in film studies because it

provides a way of relating to, and understanding, a character's subjective experience

of the world around them by drawing on the audio-viewer's own embodied

knowledge of being in the world.[50] In his book *Phenomenology of Perception*,

published in 1945, Merleau-Ponty develops the idea of the embodied subject by

rejecting Cartesian dualism (the belief in the mind and body as separate entities),

arguing instead that we are in fact embodied subjects because we perceive the

world, and our existence of it, *through* our bodies. This book has had a significant

impact on film studies in recent years with the development of theories of embodied

spectatorship – particularly through the work of Vivian Sobchack, who has argued

that 'the film experience is meaningful not to the side of our bodies but *because* of

our bodies'.[51] In her book *The Address of the Eye: the Phenomenology of Film*

Experience, Sobchack argues that the audio-viewer does not simply passively absorb

information from the screen, but is 'enmeshed bodily' with that which is being

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[49] See Jonathan Ashmore, 'Hearing' in Patricia Kruth and Henry Stobart (eds.), *Sound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 65 – 88. In *The Skin of Film* Laura U. Marks also makes this point as she writes, 'Sound…possesses tactile and haptic qualities, since it is a phenomenon related to waves, hence also to movement. In order to produce or emit a sound, an object must be touched (the strings of an instrument, the vocal chords, the wind in the trees), and sound in turn makes bodies vibrate.' Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, op. cit. p. 137.

[50] Much of the work on phenomenology and film has focussed on film's visual elements, but, as I have suggested, there are obvious ways in which it is also very relevant to the study of sound in film. The subject of phenomenology and film sound is discussed, albeit briefly, in Allan Casebier's *Film Phenomenology: Toward A Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); see especially 'Cinematic Sound', pp. 91 – 98. However, the political imperative that I think grounds Sobchack and Marks' arguments and that is fundamental to my own approach seems to be missing in Casebier's argument.

[51] Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2004), p. 60. See also Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

played out before them. This is not just achieved through the visual aspects of cinema, however, but also through a film's sound design – as Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener note in *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*, '[t]he spectator…exists as a bodily being, enmeshed acoustically, senso-motorically, somatically and affectively in the film's visual texture and soundscape.'[52] While much has been made of what Patricia Clough has called the 'affective turn' in sociology and in visual media studies, there seems to be a great deal still to be explored about sound and listening from this perspective.[53] In film studies, the most common area that this has been studied is in relation to the horror genre, such as in the work of Ben Winters.[54] However, this study aims to build on this research by exploring the ethical implications of the relationship between sound, embodiment and affect across different genres and contexts in order to consider how this aspect of film sound might be considered political.

This thesis stems from my own fascination with the impact of sound on both the body and the imagination. It explores the materiality of sound – in particular, how its ephemerality means that it has a particularly evocative connection with temporality – and by extension, history and memory, and how sound's affective power enables it to capture a sense of how it feels to remember. While the relationship between film and memory is most often described in visual terms (the use of certain editing techniques such as the flashback, for example), as Walter Benjamin describes in 'A Berlin Chronicle', this focus on the visual misses sound's own mnemonic potential. As he writes,

> The déjà vu effect has often been described. But I wonder whether the term is actually well chosen, and whether the metaphor appropriate to the process would not be far better taken from the realm of acoustics. One ought to speak of events that reach us like an echo awakened by a call, a sound that seems to have been heard somewhere in the darkness of a past life…[T]he

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[52] Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 10. See also Chapter 6: 'Cinema as Ear: Acoustics and Space', pp. 129 – 148.

[53] See Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (eds.), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007). See also Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), and Steven Shaviro, *Post Cinematic Affect* (Ropley: Zero Books, 2010).

[54] Ben Winters, 'Corporeality, Musical Heartbeats, and Cinematic Emotion', *Music, Sound and the Moving Image*, 2.1 (Spring 2008), pp. 3 – 25.

shock with which moments enter consciousness as if already lived usually strikes us in the form of a sound. It is a word, tapping, or a rustling that is endowed with the magic power to transport us into the cool tomb of long ago, from the vault of which the present seems to return only as an echo.[55]

In addition to exploring this connection between sound, memory and affect as suggested in Benjamin's description of the 'feel' of memory, through close analysis of the films' sound design, this thesis investigates how the experience of soundscapes in lived space is mediated and transposed into the cinematic experience by the soundtrack, and how the films register a sense of a character's interiority and perception through the use of subjective sound and point-of-audition (as opposed to point-of-view). While there are several theoretical and thematic overlaps between the chapters, each has a slightly different focus, which I shall now outline.

Chapter Two discusses the use of sound in the war films of Bahman Ghobadi – drawing on Steven Feld's work on acoustemology. In 'A Rainforest Acoustemology', Feld builds on ideas about phenomenology and the perception of sound found in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and Don Ihde's *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* as he argues for an 'acoustemological approach' (combining acoustics with epistemology) to understanding the importance of sound in people's lived experience of 'knowing and being in the world.'[56] For Feld, sound is an embodied but also deeply reciprocal process, in that it 'both emanates from and penetrates bodies', that at the same time orientates the body to a particular historical place and time.[57] For my purposes, what interests me about this idea (and I hope this becomes clear in my analysis of the films) is the way that an analysis of sound in lived space can reveal the different ways that we are positioned within that space. This sense of 'positioning' can be understood both in terms of the power relations at work in that particular environment, and how our own embodied selves

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[55] Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in Peter Demetz (ed.), *Reflections: Essays, Aphorism, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 59.
[56] See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) and Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (2nd ed.) (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007); and Steven Feld, 'A Rainforest Acoustemology' in Michael Bull and Les Back (eds.), *The Auditory Cultures Reader,* p. 226
[57] ibid.

'sound out' that space in order to assert a sense of autonomy and agency. As a way of 'knowing and being in the world', acoustemology communicates an intensely personal experience of sound, as each of us is positioned differently and perceives differently the spaces we inhabit, while at the same time having a much broader scope being both the cultural and the historical. Applied to an analysis of film, how particular characters perceive and experience the acoustic space they inhabit provides the audio-viewer with insight into a character's interiority and sense of self.

Feld also places importance on the significance of sound in relation to memory and authority as he argues that '[t]he soundingness of hearing and voicing constitute an embodied sense of presence and of memory…Voice is evidence, embodied as experiential authority, performed to the exterior or interior as a subjectivity made public, mirrored in hearing made subjective.'[58] Chapter Two takes up this idea of 'hearing and voicing' to discuss how Ghobadi's films create a sense of the characters' subjectivity and agency through voice as he allows children's voices and experiences to be central to the narrative through the point-of-audition (hearing) and placement of the microphone (sounding). Critiquing earlier positions put forward in film sound theory that concern voice and subjectivity, I suggest that in this way film sound can play a crucial *restorative* role in the war film, in that it can articulate a sense of characters' subjectivity, so often denied to civilian victims of war – restoring them to a central position within the narrative. In this chapter, I also explore the relationship between sound, temporality, and memory to suggest ways in which the material properties of sound can convey a sense of what has been described by trauma theorist Cathy Caruth as 'trauma time'.[59]

Chapter Three focuses on the relationship between sound, space and temporality in the films of Jia Zhangke, demonstrating how sound design in film can articulate a sense of the changing power dynamics of lived space over time. Drawing on the interdisciplinary approaches of acoustic ecology and aural history, I suggest that the films convey a sense of history and the passing of time in the PRC through the transforming soundscapes of the period – from the early days of the reform-era

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[58] ibid., pp. 226 – 227.
[59] See Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

to the present day. Through close analyses of the films' use of sound, I suggest that as sound design in film transposes experiences of sound in lived space, it can articulate the dialectic between the public and the private both by establishing the atmosphere of an era within the diegetic space of the film and by setting the (sometimes conflicting) emotional tone for each scene.

The fields of acoustic ecology and aural history are growing areas of research, and this is reflected in a number of recently published anthologies, such as: Michael Bull and Les Back's *The Auditory Culture Reader* (2003); Mark M. Smith's edited volume *Hearing History: A Reader* (2004); and Veit Erlmann's *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity* (2004).[60] Several of the essays included in these collections are influenced by the sound pioneer R. Murray Schafer's 1977 book, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, in which he developed the concept of the soundscape through the use of field recordings as part of 'The World Sound Project'.[61] This work recognised the enormous impact sound can have on the subjective experience of social space and later contributed to the development of acoustic design which now plays an important role in the planning of urban spaces. What these approaches have in common is the belief that the experience of sound cannot be separated from the experience of space. As LaBelle contends, acoustic experience is always part of a reciprocal process – a 'conversation of sound and space'.[62] While sound is influenced by the materiality of the space in which it is produced and heard, as well as in relation to the broader acoustic environment, space, he suggests, is also partly defined by 'the acoustical presence of environmental sounds, whether outside the given space or within, from a space's own internal infrastructural workings.'[63]

The notion of sound impacting on lived space and in particular, the way that power uses sound to exert control over this space is central to the work of several sound theorists I draw on in this thesis. A key figure in this respect is Jacques Attali,

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[60] Michael Bull, and Les Back (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003); Mark M. Smith (ed.), *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2004) and Veit Erlmann (ed.), *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).
[61] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1977).
[62] Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006), p. 149.
[63] Ibid.

who theorises the concept of noise as 'disorderly' sound. In his *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, he contends that sound has the ability to make material the abstract notion of power, and to both map out and 'occupy' territory. For Attali, therefore, sound plays a fundamental role in the organisation of societies, as he argues 'any organization of sounds is…a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality.'[64]

The ability of sound to map physical and social space in this way, creating geographies of inclusion and exclusion, has long been a subject of study for anthropologists and ethnomusicologists, but over the last two decades there has been a surge of interest in using soundscape analysis in the creation of aural histories. Through detailed research of official records of changing technologies of sound, as well as individual accounts of the experiences of lived space, aural historiographies such as Alain Corbin's *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth Century French Countryside*, Emily Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* and Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* have 'listened into' the soundscapes of the past, exploring its architectural and environmental sounds, as well as articulations of voice through speech or music, in order to understand the evolving power relations at work within the public sphere.[65] Echoing Attali, for example, in *Village Bells* Corbin describes the ability of sound to demarcate territory, arguing that in the Nineteenth Century French village, the bell tower performed a crucial function in ensuring

> the preservation of the community [in which] no part of that territory remained obscurately deaf to public announcements, alarms, or commands, and that there were no fragments of isolated space in which the auditory identity was ill defined and threatened to impede rapid assembly.[66]

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[64] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Manchester: University of Minnesota, 1985), p. 6.

[65] See also Bruce R, Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999); David Garrioch, 'Sounds of the City: the Soundscape of early modern European Towns', *Urban History*, 30.1 (2003), pp. 5 – 25; and Peter Bailey, 'Breaking the sound barrier: a historian listens to noise', *Body and Society*, 2 (1996), pp. 49 – 66.

[66] Alain Corbin, 'Identity, Bells and the French Village', in Mark Michael Smith (ed.), *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 185. See also Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape*

This use of sound to create order (Attali's 'organization of sounds') has important resonance for the construction of acoustic space in the PRC, and as I shall go on to discuss, is an aspect of lived experience deliberately foregrounded by the sound design of Jia Zhangke's films. Following Thompson's assertion that 'a soundscape is simultaneously a physical environment and a way of perceiving that environment', I suggest that the films' use of sound provides insights into how its characters perceive the changes in their environment over time – thus also documenting shifts in social attitudes from the end of the Cultural Revolution to the present.[67]

The third chapter also discusses the relationship between music and nationalism. In his article 'Music and the Politics of Sound: Nationalism, Citizenship, and Auditory Space', George Revill contends that nationalist music plays on sound's ability to manipulate the emotions and move the body drawing 'cultural authority' from the 'intersubjective qualities of sound.'[68] For Revill, music's ability to create participatory subjects is 'generated by its rhythmic and melodic qualities' as the social and political messages inherent in both the song's lyrics as well as pitch, rhythm and timbre 'are bound into an aesthetic of bodily involvement.' Importantly, Revill notes, music should not be thought to exist separately from the broader 'geography' of sound. In my analyses of the films of Jia Zhangke in Chapter Three therefore, I explore how music weaves in and out of the films' soundscape reflecting a change in cultural mood – firstly as revolutionary music attempts to produce 'participatory' subjects, and later as pop music articulates a growing desire for reform.

Chapter Four discusses the use of sound in the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and continues to explore the relationship between sound, memory and the body. I argue that Apichatpong's films draw not only on the director's own personal memories but also on broader aspects of 'cultural remembering' – blurring

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of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933 (Cambridge, Mass. And London: MIT Press, 2004), p. 1.

[67] Thompson, ibid.

[68] George Revill, 'Music and the Politics of Sound: Nationalism, Citizenship, and Auditory Space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18 (2000), p. 602.

the boundaries of personal and social memory while appealing to the audio-viewer's shared, embodied experience of *how we remember* through their affective power.

The films' affective soundscapes, I propose, are created through the use of pop music and through the heightening of 'natural' ambient or environmental sounds to such an extent that they become almost 'denaturalised'. This process, I suggest, means that sounds become detached from their source or informational purpose, they become what Pierre Schaeffer calls 'sonorous objects'. Influenced by Husserl, Schaeffer developed a phenomenological approach to sound analysis that was interested in describing the perceptual qualities of a sound rather than attaching it to a source and the information it might convey. As he explains: '[t]he dissociation of seeing and hearing…encourages another way of listening: we listen to the sonorous forms, without any aim other than that of hearing them better, in order to be able to describe them through an analysis of the content of our perceptions.'[69] The separation of sounds from 'information' has been taken up more recently in the work of Laura Marks in her description of what she terms, 'haptic hearing'. In *The Skin of the Film*, Marks suggests that 'haptic hearing' is the moment that occurs before our ears start to pick out individual sounds to make 'sense' of the acoustic environment by putting the sounds into an ordered form.[70] The significance of this idea in relation to the concerns of this thesis I argue, is that the *materiality* of these sounds insists on the listener's embodied, phenomenological engagement by dismantling our reliance on the verbal or the linguistic to ground our understanding of the narrative. This chapter takes up Felicity Callard and Constantina Papoulis' claim, therefore, that theories of affect move discussions of memory away from 'an understanding of subjectivity and of experience that is based on an internal world, on particular formulations of memory and representation' towards a concern with the 'nonrepresentational and extralinguisitic aspects of subjective experience'. My analysis of Apichatpong's affective use of sound does not therefore reflect a 'turn

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[69] Pierre Schaeffer, 'Acousmatics' in Christopher Cox and Daniel Warner (eds.), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005), p. 78.
[70] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, op. cit., p. 183.

away from the relationship between memory and subjectivity', but rather attempts to describe the process of remembering as 'embodied'.[71]

This chapter also discusses the politics of voice in Apichatpong's work. Analysing the director's first feature film *Mysterious Object at Noon*, I suggest that the film's emphasis on plurality creates a complex discursive space that refuses the authority of a single voice or speaking position – connecting it with the Bakhtinian concept of 'heteroglossia', in that it presents a potentially disruptive force that destabilises the notion of a unified, 'monologic' culture. Offering a multitude of differing 'social voices' (Bakhtin's 'speech genres'), I argue that the film draws out a connection between storytelling, performance and social or cultural memory – through its use of sound.

Background to the case studies
Bahman Ghobadi

Bahman Ghobadi was born in 1969 in Baneh in the northwest of Iranian Kurdistan close to the border with Iraq. After the area was heavily bombed during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), he moved with his family to the Kurdish capital Sanandaj when he was twelve years old. He later moved to Tehran, where he began his career as a filmmaker with a number of short documentaries about Kurdish life while studying for a B.A. in Film Directing at the Iranian Broadcasting College and working as an assistant director on Abbas Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us* (*Bad ma ra khahad bord*, 1999). With the release of his documentary, *Life in the Fog* (*Zendegi dar meh*, 1999), which would become the basis for his first feature film, *A Time for Drunken Horses* (*Zamani barayé masti asbha*, 1999), his work began to be recognised both nationally and internationally, being nominated for a number of awards – winning the FIPRESCI Prize and the Camera d'Or at Cannes for *A Time for Drunken Horses* in 2000. Since then, he has gone on to make four more feature films, which have met with similar levels of international acclaim, although they received limited exhibition

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[71] Felicity Callard and Constantina Papoulis, 'Affect and Embodiment' in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 247.

at home. Ghobadi is known for his compassionate storytelling, which until recently has focussed on the experiences of the Kurds since the Iran-Iraq War, using a documentary aesthetic (with occasional touches of magic realism in his later work) to celebrate what he sees as the Kurds' resilient spirit in the face of centuries of adversity.

In recent years, Bahman Ghobadi has without doubt become the leading figurehead for Kurdish Cinema – an area of filmmaking that has received surprisingly little detailed critical attention. A handful of English language publications provide brief overviews, such as Hamid Reza Sadr's *Iranian Cinema: A Political History* (2006); Eric Egan's essay 'Regime Critics Confront Censorship in Iranian Cinema' in Josef Gugler's *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence* (2011); Viola Shafik's *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (1998); and Asuman Suner's *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity, and Memory* (2010).[72] As these authors concur, the most important forerunner of Kurdish film is generally accepted to have been Yilmaz Güney's *Yol* (1981). After *Yol*, a small number of films dealing with the experiences of Kurds were made in Turkey – most famously, Yesim Ustaoglu's *Journey to the Sun* (*Günese yolculuk*, 1999) – and in the Kurdish Diaspora, including Nizamettin Aric's *A Song for Beko* (*Klamek ji bo Beko*, 1992) made in 1992 in Armenia, followed two years later by Ibrahim Selman's *Silent Travellers (De zwijgende reiziger*, 1994) in Greece. In Iranian cinema, Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (*Takhté siah*, 2000) and Ghobadi's *A Time for Drunken Horses* brought Kurdish Iranian Cinema to an international audience through screenings at a number of art house festivals. Later, the Iraqi Kurd, Hiner Saleem made *Vodka Lemon* (2003), *Kilometre Zero* (*Kilomètre zero*, 2005) and *Dol* (2007) in France.

Over the last few years, Ghobadi has been actively involved in supporting this emerging Kurdish film culture – particularly in Iranian Kurdistan, where he has been instrumental in a cinema-building project that aims to provide an exhibition space

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[72] Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema: A Political History* (New York and London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Eric Egan, 'Regime Critics Confront Censorship in Iranian Cinema' in Josef Gugler (ed.), *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), pp. 37 – 62.; Viola Shafik, *Arab Cinema: History and Cultural Identity* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998), and, Asuman Suner, *New Turkish Cinema: Belonging, Identity, and Memory* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010).

for Kurds to see his films.[73] More widely, however, within the context of filmmaking in Iran, Ghobadi identifies two major difficulties that face filmmakers – firstly, the need for self-censorship and the subsequent move towards formulaic narratives in order to get the work through the censors at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Secondly, he argues that because of the level of governmental control over all aspects of culture in Iran, the country lacks a sufficient infrastructure (in terms of funding and equipment) to support an independent film culture; as he says, 'The festival, the Ministry, film stocks, equipment, bank loans, permission to shoot…everything is controlled by the government… [S]ince there are no non-governmental organizations to support them, 99.9% of our filmmakers are forced to surrender to the will of the government.'[74]

As Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad describes in *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic*, since the 1979 Revolution, cultural policy in Iran has been driven by ideology, and cinema, in particular, has been heavily regulated in order to ensure its use as a tool for communicating Islamic values. As he writes,

> Politics in Iran has been effectively inseparable from culture in recent history. In February 1979 at the height of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, in his first speech in Iran upon return from exile talked about cinema's

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[73] In an interview with Zoya Honarmand and Gilda Boffa in 2009, Ghobadi says,

> [T]here are four million Kurds living in the four countries of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iraq. And for years we didn't have a movie theatre or a film school or Kurdish films or Kurdish language films. I am very proud to be the first Kurdish filmmaker in the world to make a feature film in Kurdish. So I have an audience – those four million Kurds are my audience…It's a responsibility. It's not a matter of nationalism.

http://www.offscreen.com/index.php/pages/essays/bahman_ghobadi/ [published 31.01.11] [accessed 5.04.11]

[74] Ibid. Despite these restrictions, the increased availability of cameras and DV technology has led to a younger generation of filmmakers beginning to make films particularly through projects such as the 2007 Iranian Films for Peace short film series, with which Ghobadi was involved. Commissioned by the NGO documentary and activist network, 'Cultures of Resistance' as part of their 'Make Films Not War' programme funded by the Conflict Zone Film Fund, Ghobadi's company MIJ Productions co-produced five short films by young Iranian filmmakers – two of whom were just ten and thirteen years old. The films are *On That Day* by Babak Amini; *The Piggy Bank That I Found* by thirteen year old Arsham Naghsbandi; *Runaway* by Hamid Ghavami; *Dream House* by ten-year-old Ahoora Zamanpira and *The Soldier and the Road* by Nahid Ghobadi (who was also an assistant on Bahman Ghobadi's 2003 documentary, *Daf*). See http://www.culturesofresistance.org/ghobadi-shorts [accessed 05.04.11]

capacity to impact society. Ever since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the handling of cinema has been a grave political matter.[75]

The 1978 -79 Revolution, he explains, led to a strong cultural and social shift in the 'boundaries of what is considered 'political' in Iran.'[76] In some ways, like the use of the arts during the Cultural Revolution in China, the regime politicised culture. This practice, he argues, has continued since the Revolution because of the sustained periods of social and political upheaval in the decades that ensued – firstly, during the Iran-Iraq War, and then during a long period of discontent that began with the 1997 reformist movement, which has led to a further tightening of governmental control.[77] As Eric Egan notes in his essay, 'Regime Critics Confront Censorship in Iranian Cinema', the 'perceived liberalization of the cultural sphere' that accompanied the reformist movement resulted in the regime increasing restrictions placed on the media – leading to the closure of several newspapers. Included in these measures was the introduction of a new cinema law in 2000 that placed the onus of gaining a permit to produce and screen a film onto the producers and directors. This was met with outrage from the industry, as Egan explains, because the 'proposal rendered them defenceless against the judiciary and in fact increased the arbitrary power of the latter to intervene directly in screening decisions…These measures were bolstered by a stricter application of the censorship laws.'[78] As a result, the work of several filmmakers seen as critical of the regime was banned.

Since Fundamentalist President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, and particularly since his re-election in 2009 (waved in by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei), restrictions on freedoms of expression have deepened in response to a number of anti-government protests led by reformists and moderates disputing the election result. The most recent of these occurred in Tehran in February 2011 amid a wave of pro-democracy protests that swept across the Middle

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[75] Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad, *The Politics of Iranian Cinema: Film and Society in the Islamic Republic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 1.
[76] Ibid., p. 2.
[77] See ibid.
[78] Eric Egan, 'Regime Critics Confront Censorship in Iranian Cinema' in Josef Gugler (ed.), *Film in the Middle East and North Africa: Creative Dissidence* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 57.

East.[79] For Iran's film industry, critical of the 'un-Islamic' values of the Khatami administration, the government's control of material and funding since the 2005 election has resulted in its virtual suffocation.[80] Significantly, in the first four years of the Ahmadinejad regime, only two Iranian films, Saman Salur's *Lonely Tune of Tehran* (*Taraneh tanhaïye Tehran*, 2008) and Ghobadi's *Nobody Knows about Persian Cats* (*Kasi az gorbehaye irani khabar nadareh*, 2009), were shown at the Cannes Film Festival. Both had been denied production permits and were filmed illegally; privately submitted to the festival, they both received strong criticism from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.[81]

Somewhat idealistically, Egan suggests that Iranian cinema has long managed to function and even flourish within this 'hostile environment', producing generations of artists who have 'continued to subvert, undermine, and question notions of censorship', becoming the 'critical conscience' of Iranian society. He writes,

> Historically the absence of a civil society in Iran and the implementation of repressive official politics have stifled the terms of public debate to such an extent that it has fallen on the artist to act as the critical conscience and give voice to those unable to speak. This has been and continues to be the driving force of the best Iranian cinema where the medium is used as an engaged mode of expression and an instrument of social change.[82]

Recent events in Iran, however, mean that one cannot help but read these words with some scepticism. While prominent, successful directors such as Abbas Kiarostami may hold some degree of political immunity, others – particularly younger, less established filmmakers who are more vocal about their unhappiness with the current situation in Iran – are quite powerless. Their ideas for films, rather than becoming 'instruments of political change', under such oppressive restraints often lie impotent – either remaining unrealised or made into films that are curtailed to such an extent that they barely resemble the initial idea, while those that *are*

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[79] See http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/02/201121412571299951.html [accessed 05.04.11]
[80] See Egan op. cit. p. 58.
[81] Ibid., p. 60.
[82] Ibid., p. 58.

made illegally are rarely seen within Iran itself except through the circulation of black market DVDs.

Iranian New Wave directors such as Kiarostami and Mohsen Makhmalbaf brought Iranian cinema to Western audiences in the 1990s through their exposure and acclaim at international film festivals, often using highly symbolic or poetic imagery through which to tell their stories of everyday life in Iran and evade the authorities. Recently, however, because of the heightened sense of political instability in Iran (and across the Middle East), the level of control placed upon filmmakers has escalated to an unprecedented level, suggesting that they now have to negotiate a far more treacherous terrain in order to make and show their work. Most famously, Jafar Panahi, director of *The White Balloon* (*Badkonake Sefid*, 1995), *The Circle* (*Dayereh*, 2000) and *Offside* (2006) and a vocal supporter of the opposition Green Movement, was arrested in March 2010 – accused of making propaganda against the regime. He was later sentenced to six years in prison and banned from directing and producing films for the next twenty years.[83] Also arrested were Mohammad Rasoulof – director of *The White Meadows* (*Keshtzar haye sepid*, 2009), *Head Wind* (*Baad-e daboor*, 2008), *Iron Island* (*Jazireh ahani*, 2005), and *The Twilight* (*Gagooman*, 2002), and Mehdi Pourmoussa, assistant director on Ghobadi's *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (*Kasi az gorbehaye irani khabar nadareh*, 2009).

In two separate incidents, Bahman Ghobadi and his partner and co-writer of *Persian Cats* – Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi – were also arrested. Saberi was sentenced to eight years in prison on charges of espionage for the United States, but was released in May 2010. Ghobadi was not charged but was subjected to repeated arrests and violent intimidation. In a recent interview he describes one of these occasions that took place on June 2nd 2009, during the making of *Persian Cats*[84]:

> I wanted to leave Iran through the airport with a legal passport. My friends told me not to leave legally because the authorities would stop me and take

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[83] See Saeed Kamall Dehghan, 'Iran jails director Jafar Panahi and stops him making films for 20 years' [posted 20.12.10] http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/20/iran-jails-jafar-panahi-films [accessed 05.04.11].
[84] A hybrid docudrama about the experiences of young musicians involved in Tehran's illegal underground rock scene.

my passport away. So I went to Kurdistan in order to leave illegally at the border where I made *A Time for Drunken Horses*. It was there that I was arrested by plain-clothes militia. They took me to Hamedan for three days, and then to Tehran. It was two days before the presidential elections in June that they told me to leave Iran. They had created this kind of fear in me prior to the event, but this time it was a lot more intense. Every time I travelled, they would take me in at the airport, interview me, and invite me to the Ministry of Information. There, they would tell me very politely to take my stuff and leave Iran. This happened seven or eight times. Each time I questioned why I should leave my own country, they told me: 'If you don't want to leave, don't make movies in the Kurdish language, or don't interview with foreign media outlets, or don't make movies about such matters.'[85]

Because of the current political and cultural climate in Iran, it is difficult to imagine how from this point on, Ghobadi's work can be considered part of its national cinema. His own uncertain position, both personally and professionally, means that if he is able to continue to make films (and his latest feature, *Rhino's Season*, is currently being filmed in Turkey), their fractured relationship to his homeland's national cinema must be acknowledged. What follows might perhaps need to be critically reframed as 'cinema of the exile' in the sense that in the foreseeable future, the films' existence will become increasingly dependent on transnational support as Ghobadi and others, like the artists and filmmakers of the Revolutionary period, are forced into exile.

Jia Zhangke

Born in 1970 in Fenyang in the Shanxi Province of Northern China, Jia Zhangke went on to train at the Beijing Academy where he made his first film, *Shan Going Home* (*Xiaoshan huijia*, 1995). Since then, he has made several features and documentaries focussing on the experiences of working class, usually small-town protagonists. Well known for his gritty realist style, his films often deal with the problematic

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[85] Bahman Ghobadi interview with Livia Bloom, *Filmmaker Magazine* (Spring, 2010) http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/issues/spring2010/persian-cats.php [accessed 15.03.11] For more on the political context of filmmaking in Iran, see Hamid Reza Sadr, *Iranian Cinema: A Political History* (New York and London: IB Tauris, 2006), and Lina Khatib, *Filming in the Modern Middle East: Politics in the Cinemas of Hollywood and the Arab World* (New York and London: IB Tauris, 2006).

relationship between memory and history in contemporary China and the human cost of the country's rapid economic and industrial development since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Widely regarded as a leading figure in the 'Sixth Generation' Chinese film movement, he is undoubtedly one of the most influential directors working in independent Chinese cinema today, as well as being celebrated on the international art house circuit.

The films of Jia Zhangke share with those of Bahman Ghobadi an ambivalent relationship to the national. Jia's films explore this contested space through their depiction of the heterogeneity of lived experience in China, and in particular their foregrounding of regional identities – most notably that of the northern Shanxi province, and by the use of dialect. The significance of dialect in Chinese film is considered by Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh in their edited collection, *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*, where they note: 'If language is in part what lends unity to the Chinese nation-state and more broadly to a sense of Chineseness among the diasporic populations, it is also a force fraught with tension and contention.'[86] While Mandarin, the Beijing dialect (*Guoyu* or *Putonghua*), became the state's official language (in both the PRC and Taiwan) in the mid-twentieth century, there are many dialects still spoken both in China and in the diaspora. With regard to Chinese language cinema, Lu argues, 'language, dialects, and accents are coterminous with the realm of the nation-state. They may serve the interests of the nation or be used as critiques of the nation. In either case, the national is the ultimate referent and horizon of meaning.'[87]

Films that use dialect therefore, such as those by Jia Zhangke, by this very fact enact a critique of the dominant conception of a homogenous nation-state. Jin Liu's 'The Rhetoric of Local Languages as the Marginal: Chinese Underground Films by Jia Zhangke and Others' and Lu's 'Dialect and Modernity in 21st Century Sinophone Cinema' also address this important distinction between the use of language across dominant and 'alternative' film cultures in China.[88]

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[86] Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (eds.), *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), p. 3.
[87] Ibid.
[88] See Jin Liu, 'The Rhetoric of Local Languages as the Marginal: Chinese Underground Films by Jia Zhangke and Others', *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 18.2 (2006), pp. 163 – 205. In his

A further factor that problematises Jia's early work in relation to China's national cinema is censorship. Banned from making films by the Chinese Film Bureau in January 1999, domestic audiences for his films were restricted to small cinephile film clubs and individuals willing to buy pirated copies on DVD and VCD (a scene in *Unknown Pleasures* (*Ren xiao yao*, 2002) makes a self-reflexive joke about this). The ban was lifted in January 2004 following a shift in film policy.[89]

As both Paul Pickowicz and Lu have observed, Chinese independent cinema has evolved both through 'its marginal status within China and its high profile in global film festival culture.'[90] Yet since the beginning of Jia's career with *Xiao Wu*, there have been several significant changes to film legislation in China due to the relaxation of censorship laws in the early 2000s meaning that many of China's 'underground' filmmakers, including Jia, have moved to the mainstream (although often in reality still only being seen by comparatively small audiences interested in art house cinema).[91] These developments in policy have been discussed in a small number of essays. For example, Seio Nakajima's 'Film as Cultural Politics' and Sheldon Lu's 'Emerging from Underground and the Periphery: Chinese Independent Cinema at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century' both provide a useful overview.[92] Nakajima describes the important turning point of November 2003 when Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai and Lou Ye were called to a meeting with the Film Bureau

discussion of *Platform*, Jin Liu notes that Jia's use of local languages is inauthentic because none of the leading actors speak Fenyang Mandarin, the local dialect of the community in which the film is set. See also Sheldon Lu, 'Dialect and Modernity in 21st Century Sinophone Cinema,' *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 49 (Spring 2007). http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/Lu/index.html [accessed 11.04.11]

[89] See Lu, p. 110. See also 'Who framed Jia Zhangke?' by Lu Yuan, June 7, 2007 and Jia's essay 'A Perplexing Incident', http://zonaeuropa.com/20070612_1.htm [accessed 12.10.08]

[90] Sheldon Lu, 'Emerging from Underground and the Periphery: Chinese Independent Cinema at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century' in Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, and Belen Vidal (eds.), *Cinema at the Periphery*, (Detroit: Wayne State University, 2010), p. 106.

[91] A shift that Lu puts down to the inauguration of President Hu Jintao in 2003 – now Paramount Leader of the PRC. See Lu, ibid., p. 108.

[92] Seio Nakajima, 'Film as Cultural Politics' in You-tien Hsing and Ching Kwan Lee (eds.), *Reclaiming Chinese Society: The New Social Activism* (Abington, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 159 – 183. An earlier essay on this subject is Valerie Jaffee's essay, 'Bringing the World to the Nation: Jia Zhangke and the Legitimation of Chinese Underground Film', which describes the impact of these changes on the work of Jia Zhangke through a discussion of *The World*, the first of his films to be officially sanctioned. See also Valerie Jaffee, 'Bringing the World to the Nation: Jia Zhangke and the Legitimation of Chinese Underground Film'. *Senses of Cinema*, 34 (May, 2004). http://www.sensesofcinema.com/contents.04/32/Chinese_underground_film.html [accessed: 15/01/2007].

in response to what the officials believed was a crisis in the domestic film industry. At this meeting, Nakajima writes, a small group of film directors, academics and critics signed a petition requesting changes to the existing regulations and film policies. The petition, Nakajima notes, included four main points:

> [Firstly] to allow the domestic independent films produced in the past (i.e. films that had not applied for censorship and thus currently prohibited from distribution and exhibition) to apply for the censorship *ex post facto*, and have opportunities to be shown to domestic audiences. The second asks that film censorship and the future film-rating system have clearer standards and have a transparent and fair process of application. The third asks for more creative freedom in filmmaking and hopes that a film-rating system will replace the film censorship system. The fourth hopes that the government will support with money and policy those films that have 'artistic creativity' but which lack market appeal.[93]

Nakajima notes that in response to the petition, the Film Bureau of the SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television) introduced new regulations. The most significant change was a general simplification of the process, meaning that rather than having to submit the entire script for scrutiny in order to obtain a permit, the film production unit would only need to supply a short synopsis. A film-ratings system was also agreed. Since then, most of the 'independent' filmmakers have produced films that have been officially sanctioned by the Film Bureau, including Jia Zhangke, whose films, since *The World* (*Shijie*, 2004) have all been approved and have been made with comparatively large budgets – *The World*, for example, was made with a budget of 8 million Yuan.[94] Lu's essay 'Emerging from Underground and the Periphery: Chinese Independent Cinema at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century' also provides a useful overview of recent developments in production and exhibition of independent film in China.[95] Focussing on Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren,* 2006), the essay explores the visual aesthetics of independent film and how they

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[93] Seio Nakajima, op. cit. p. 172.
[94] Ibid., p. 173.
[95] Lu, 'Emerging from Underground and the Periphery', op. cit.

differ from dominant Chinese cinema, as well as relating the analysis to an understanding of the films as 'transnational.'[96]

Jia Zhangke is part of a vibrant and diverse film culture centred in Beijing – (mainly due to the presence of the highly regarded Beijing Film Academy from which several of the country's leading filmmakers have graduated) and there have been a small number of important publications that focus on independent film culture in China, including the following edited collections: Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang's *From Underground to Independent: Alternate Film Culture in Contemporary China* (2006); and Zhang Zhen's *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (2007).[97] Both of these contain a number of extremely insightful essays. However, over the last ten years, not only has Jia become a leading figure in this movement, but he has also become widely recognised as one of the most important directors working in Asian cinema – respected equally at home in China and amongst international art house audiences. Unlike Ghobadi and Apichatpong, this success has resulted in a great deal of critical attention both academically and in film journalism. In order to situate my own approach to his work in relation to this existing body of writing with which it is in dialogue, I shall provide a brief overview of the key texts that have helped shape my analysis.

Jason McGrath's essay, 'Independent' Cinema: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic', provides a very detailed analysis of Jia's films visual aesthetic and a clear overview of the films in terms of their historical context – specifically in relation to realism.[98] McGrath makes an important distinction between

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[96] This phenomenon is also discussed at length in Lu's edited collections: *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), especially, Part II: Cinema, pp. 87 – 138; and *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997).

[97] Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang, *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006) and Zhang Zhen (ed.), *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).

[98] Jason McGrath, 'Independent' Cinema: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic' in *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 129 – 164.

socialist and postsocialist realism,[99] as he suggests that the films' aesthetic is postsocialist in two ways – firstly, that it is 'a successor and contrast to the previously dominant aesthetic of socialist realism' and secondly, in 'the sense that it is a realism of the postsocialist condition.'[100] As McGrath notes, the socialist realism of state media and official 'main melody' (*zhuxuanlü*) films was a concept adopted during the Cultural Revolution from the Soviet Union and mobilised as part of a revolutionary aesthetic that combined realism with melodrama.[101] According to McGrath, films produced during this earlier period were intended not only to depict 'the raw, visible surface of reality but more importantly an underlying ideological truth composed of class struggle and the inexorable historical movement toward a communist utopia.'[102] By contrast, he suggests, the independent films of the 1990s used a realist aesthetic to expose 'the ideological representations that distort it.'[103] As he writes,

> postsocialist reality cinema does not directly promulgate an oppositional ideology but rather indirectly critiques mainstream ideology by foregrounding ordinary people's experiences that normally go unrepresented by either the officially sanctioned media or the entertainment industry. This tactic of exposing rather than opposing rests on the belief that social contradictions are apparent in everyday life but elided [in] mainstream representation. The postsocialist realist films of the 1990s are thus imbued with the faith that just going into the public with a camera and capturing the unvarnished street life one finds there serves to unmask ideology while documenting the realities of contemporary China. [104]

These observations are shared by Yingjin Zhang in his essay, 'My Camera Doesn't Lie? Truth, Subjectivity and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video' in

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[99] As does Yingjin Zhang in his essay, 'My Camera Doesn't Lie? Truth, Subjectivity and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video', in Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang (eds.), *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 23 – 45.

[100] McGrath, 'Independent' Cinema: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic', op. cit., p. 132.

[101] For a detailed study of this genre see Jason McGrath, 'Cultural Revolution Model Opera Films and the Realist Tradition in Chinese Cinema', *The Opera Quarterly*, 26.2-3 (Spring-Summer 2010), pp. 343-376.

[102] Jason McGrath, ''Independent' Cinema: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic' in *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2008, p. 132.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., p. 136.

which he argues that, 'as an overloaded concept, realism has become formulaic and prescriptive, and symbolises an authoritarian tradition that has alienated and infuriated many independent directors.'[105] In this insightful essay, Zhang goes on to describe Jia's attitude towards dominant cinema particularly in the late 1990s when he publicly denounced 'all those 'lies' he found on screen' that failed to deal with the reality of most people's lived experience in contemporary China.[106] For Jia, rather than attempting to depict 'reality', through his work he hoped to achieve a sense of the 'feeling of the real', as he suggests, 'the feeling of the real is on the level of aesthetics whereas reality just stays in the realm of sociology.'[107]

The distrust Jia displays here in dominant cinema, but also I think in the 'othering' ethnographic impulse of certain kinds of realist filmmaking, is made evident through his championing of amateur filmmakers, and the role they can play in recording the unofficial memories and experiences of ordinary Chinese in his essay, 'The Age of Amateur Cinema Will Return.'[108] The essay was first published in the Southern Weekend (*Nanfang zhoumo*) newspaper in 1999 and, as Valerie Jaffee notes, quickly became 'widely cited as something of a manifesto relevant to the dawn of the DV era.'[109] This essay and the concept of amateurism is the subject of Jaffee's 'The Ambivalent Cult of Amateur Art in New Chinese Documentaries' in which she explains that Jia puts forward the notion of 'amateurism' (*yeyuxing*) as a way of democratising China's film culture, allowing for increased freedom of expression.[110] While clearly Jia is not himself an amateur, I would argue that the

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[105] Yingjin Zhang, 'My Camera Doesn't Lie? Truth, Subjectivity and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video', in Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang (eds.), *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), p. 27.

[106] Ibid., p. 25.

[107] Quoted in Sun Jianmin, 'Jingyan shijiezhong de yingxiang xuanze: Jia Zhangke fangtan lu' [Selecting images in the experimental world: An interview with Jia Zhangke, *Jinri xianfeng* [*Avant-garde today*] 12 (March 2002) p. 31 cited in Jason McGrath, op. cit., p. 110.

[108] Originally published in Zhang, Xianmin and Zhang, Yaxuan (eds.), *One Person's Impression: Complete Guidebook to DV* (*Yigeren de yingxiang: DV wanquan shouce*) (Beijing: China Youth Publishing, 2003). See full translation by Yuqian Yan at http://dgeneratefilms.com/academia/jia-zhangke-the-age-of-amateur-cinema-will-return/ [accessed 6.04.11] See also Yingjin Zhang, 'My Camera Doesn't Lie? Truth, Subjectivity and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video', op. cit., pp. 33 – 34.

[109] Valerie Jaffee, 'Bringing the World to the Nation: Jia Zhangke and the Legitimation of Chinese Underground Film', op. cit.

[110] Valerie Jaffee, 'The Ambivalent Cult of Amateur Art in New Chinese Documentaries' in Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang (eds.), *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 77 – 108.

political sympathies demonstrated in his work, through the films' depiction of the experiences of regional or somehow otherwise marginalised characters, nonetheless aligns it with this ideological position. As with Ghobadi's work, this is fundamentally a concern with the politics of voice that demonstrates a frustration with the homogeneity of dominant discourse, particularly in relation to how people's experiences are documented and remembered in history, as his words suggest: 'Remembering history is no longer the exclusive right (*tequan*) of the government. As an ordinary (*putong*) intellectual, I firmly believe that our culture should be teeming with unofficial memories (*minjian de jiyi*).'[111]

Yingjin Zhang explores this notion of populism (in the sense of representing a diverse *populous* as opposed to producing films that are necessarily *popular* amongst Chinese audiences) contained in Jia's concept of *minjian* (which here refers to both 'unofficial' and 'folk'), noting some significant differences that seem to set Jia's approach to his work apart from that of some of his contemporaries. As Zhang argues, while Jia's belief that as 'ordinary intellectuals' (as opposed to those connected with or employed by the state) independent filmmakers have a *social obligation* to represent China's 'personal histories' (*geren de jiyi)* through their work, the films of other members of the 'Sixth Generation', such as Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai and He Jianjun (sometimes known as the 'newborn generation' (*xinsheng dai*), are characterised by what he calls a 'rebellious, almost *antisocial* spirit'.[112] This philosophical difference clearly has important significance for how Jia's work should be approached, as his films seem to demonstrate this sense of social responsibility by foregrounding the experiences of those who have generally been sidelined by the grand narrative of China's 'economic miracle'.

The majority of critical writing on the aesthetics of Jia Zhangke's work has focussed on the image, situating the analysis in the films' social, political and historical context. Of those not already mentioned these include: Chris Berry's '*Xiao Wu*: Watching Time Go By'; Tonglin Lu's 'Trapped Freedom and Localized Globalism'; Xiaoping Lin's 'Jia Zhangke's Cinematic Trilogy: A Journey across the Ruins of Post-Mao China'; and more recently, Zhang Xudong's 'Poetics of Vanishing: The Films of

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[111] Jia Zhangke, 'The Age of Amateur Cinema Will Return', cited in Jason McGrath, op. cit.
[112] Yingjin Zhang, 'My Camera Doesn't Lie?', op. cit., pp. 25 – 26 (my italics).

Jia Zhangke' and Dudley Andrew's essay on the use of DV in *The World* and *Still Life* in his monograph, *What Cinema Is!*[113] There are some notable exceptions however where the significance of the films' use of sound is discussed. Michael Berry's *Jia Zhangke's Hometown Trilogy* for example, offers a brief, but insightful discussion of the 'realist' sound design of *Xiao Wu* – describing how the film's often disorientating use of sound (on the insistence of the director) led to its original sound designer, Lin Xiaoling leaving the production.[114]

Aside from Berry's work, discussion of the films' sound design has tended to focus on the use of music as opposed to ambient or environmental sound. These include Jin Liu's essay referred to earlier, which describes Jia's extensive use of pop music as helping to convey the film's historical setting – as 'cheap wallpaper' to establish 'a period scene.'[115] Tonglin Lu's 'Music and Noise: Independent Film and Globalization' also deals mainly with the use of pop music (although with a very short descriptive passage on noise), as does Kin-Yan Szeto's 'A Moist Heart: Love, Politics and China's Neoliberal Transition in the Films of Jia Zhangke.'[116] While both of these essays provide some interesting points of analysis, they are nonetheless disappointing in that they fail to engage with the ever-growing body of critical writing on music and sound in film, which might have broadened the scope of their arguments.

In terms of a more general cultural analysis of the significance of pop music after the Cultural Revolution however, Nimrod Baranovitch's *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender and Politics, 1978-1997* provides an extremely rich and wide ranging account. Similarly, Elena Pollacchi's 'The Sound of the City: Chinese

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[113] Chris Berry, '*Xiao Wu*: Watching Time Go By' in Chris Berry (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus II* (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 250 – 257; Tonglin Lu, 'Trapped Freedom and Localized Globalism' in Paul G. Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang (eds.), *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publ., 2006), pp. 123 – 141; Xiaoping Lin, 'Jia Zhangke's Cinematic Trilogy: A Journey across the Ruins of Post-Mao China' in Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (eds.), *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), pp. 186 – 209; Zhang Xudong, 'Poetics of Vanishing: The Films of Jia Zhangke', *New Left Review* 63 (May-June 2010).

[114] Michael Berry, *Jia Zhangke's Hometown Trilogy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also McGrath op. cit.

[115] Jin Liu, op. cit., p. 175.

[116] Tonglin Lu, 'Music and Noise: Independent Film and Globalization,' *The China Review*, 3.1 (Spring 2003), pp. 57 – 76; Kin-Yan Szeto, 'A Moist Heart: Love, Politics and China's Neoliberal Transition in the Films of Jia Zhangke', *Visual Anthropology*, 22.2-3 (2009), pp. 95 – 107.

Films of the 1990s and Urban Noise' offers an excellent analysis of the use of sound in 1990s independent Chinese film, while also situating it in the broader historical context of Chinese cinema. Although neither of these texts discusses the work of Jia Zhangke, they have nonetheless both been influential in my own approach to thinking about sound and the cinematic representation of social space.[117]

Pollacchi's essay explores how the use of 'natural sound, as an alternative to or in combination with dubbed dialogues', has developed since the mid-1990s in Chinese independent film as a result of significant changes in film production regulations. This includes the legalisation of on-location filming and the increased availability of digital equipment – an important shift resulting in the films having more opportunity to communicate the phenomenological experience of urban life through their use of 'natural' sound. As Pollacchi notes, this use of ambient sound, which has the potential to expose realities elided in official discourse, contrasts with the highly controlled methods of state studio production that 'since the nationalisation of the Chinese film industry in the 1950s, left out any natural sound in order to emphasise, through dialogue and music, the ideological message' of the Communist Party.[118] The use of sound in 1990s independent film, she notes, does however have a historical counterpart in pre-nationalised Chinese cinema – particularly, the films of the 1930s when sound was first introduced with Shichuan Zhang's *Sing-Song Girl Red Pony*, (*Genü hongmudan*, 1931). Reminiscent of Jia Zhangke's desire to recreate 'the feeling of the real' in his work, films of this period, including Chusheng Cai's *New Woman* (*Xin nü xing,* 1935), Xiling Shen's *Crossroads* (*Shi zi jie tou*, 1937) and Muzhi Yuan's *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*, 1937), Pollacchi notes, 'attempted to recreate the noise of the city (streets with trams and vehicles, whistles of factories, ships and so on) to enhance the experience of the modern metropolis.'[119] It was only after 1949, that nationalisation 'forced cinema off the streets' (to use Pollacchi's expression) and into the studio. Even as late as the 1980s, she notes, the films of the Fifth Generation such as Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (*Huang*

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[117] Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender and Politics, 1978-1997.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Elena Pollacchi 'The Sound of the City: Chinese Films of the 1990s and Urban Noise' in Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (eds.), *Cities in Transition and the Modern Metropolis* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), pp. 193 – 204.
[118] Ibid., p. 193.
[119] Ibid.

tu di, 1984) could therefore only challenge the system's 'polished sound' through deliberate silence and limited use of music. The Sixth Generation's 'return to the street' enabled by changes to the Chinese film industry and the availability of digital technology allowed the noise of the city to be heard once more, she argues, raising 'significant issues for analysis.'[120]

Despite this perceived relaxation of film censorship and regulation in China in recent years, as Sheldon Lu points out, there are still taboo subjects for films. Li Yang's *Blind Shaft* (*Mang jing*, 2003), for example, which implicitly comments on the widespread human rights abuses in China's coal mining industry, was not accepted for public release in China. Similarly, because Lou Ye's *Summer Palace* (*Yiheyuan,* 2006) contained references to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and was not submitted to the authorities for approval before it showed at the Cannes Film Festival in 2006, the director was blacklisted and banned from making films for five years. The long-term effects that this will have on China's burgeoning independent film culture is uncertain, but there are already signs that the move towards its liberalisation may be on the retreat. In April 2011, for example, the well-established independent Songzhuang Documentary Film Festival (currently in its eighth year due to be held the first week of May), was forced to cancel. The organisers expressed that this was due to external pressure and the extremely tense political atmosphere. Not coincidently, at the same time the state-supported Beijing International Film Festival, due to have its inaugural event at the end of April, made a late addition of an approved selection of documentary films to their programme.[121] As in Iran, the right to make and show films that foreground the politics of voice in China seems never more urgent as it does now.

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[120] Ibid.

[121] See Clifford Coonan, 'Songzhuang doc fest cancelled' V*ariety*. 21.04.11
http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118035740?categoryid=13&cs=1&cmpid=RSS|News|LatestNews
[accessed 25.04.11]

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Apichatpong Weerasethakul was born in Bangkok in 1970 but grew up in the town of Khon Kaen in Northeast Thailand. He studied architecture at Khon Kaen University before completing a Masters of Fine Arts at the School of Art Institute in Chicago where he made his first short films in 1994. On returning to Bangkok, he formed the independent production company 'Kick the Machine' and made his first feature film, *Mysterious Object at Noon* (*Dogfar Nai Meu Marn*, 2000). Since then he has gone on to make several feature films, shorts and video installations, which cross the boundaries of visual artist and filmmaker exhibiting his work both nationally and internationally. Through 'Kick the Machine' he has been an active supporter of Thailand's independent film culture, co-directing the fifth Bangkok Experimental Film Festival in 2008.[122]

In contrast to the work of Jia Zhangke, although having received a great deal of attention in film journalism, particularly since his most recent film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (*Loong Boonmee raleuk chat*, 2010) won the coveted Palme d'Or at Cannes, Apichatpong's films have so far only been discussed in a handful of academic essays as well as being the subject of an edited collection by James Quandt.[123] These include: May Adadol Ingawanij and Richard Lowell MacDonald's 'Blissfully Whose? Jungle Pleasures, Ultra-modernist Cinema and the Cosmopolitan Thai Auteur, Arnika Fuhrmann's 'Tropical Malady: Homosexuality, Culture, and Economy in Thai Film and Politics After 1997', Anchalee Chaiworaporn, 'A Perceiver of Sense: Apichatpong Weerasethakul' and Jihoon Kim, 'Between Auditorium and Gallery: Perception in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Films and Installations.'[124]

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[122] Kick the Machine Films was founded in 1999 in Bangkok by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Eric Chan, Gridthiya Gaweewong, Michael Shaowanasai, and Suaraya Weerasethakul to support film and video in Thailand and promote their work abroad. It co-organised the Bangkok Experimental Film Festivals in 1999, 2001, 2005, and 2008. See http://www.kickthemachine.com/about/index.html [accessed 12.10.07]. The Thai Film Foundation, a non-profit organisation, was instrumental in the development of the independent film and video culture in Thailand through its organisation of the first Annual Short Film Festival in Bangkok in 1996.

[123] James Quandt (ed.), *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009).

[124] May Adadol Ingawanij and Richard Lowell MacDonald, 'Blissfully whose? Jungle Pleasures, Ultra-Modernist Cinema and the Cosmopolitan Thai Auteur', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 4.1 (2006), pp. 37 – 54; Arnika Furhmann, 'Tropical Malady: Homosexuality, Culture, and Economy in

As with Bahman Ghobadi and Jia Zhangke, Apichatpong's position within a national cinema is less than straightforward for a number of reasons. Firstly, his films are transnationally funded and widely acclaimed in international art house circuits, while his audiences at home have tended to be restricted to small cinephile circles. Where his films have had theatrical release in Thailand (such as *Tropical Malady* (*Sud Pralad,* 2004)) they have been met with mixed responses.[125] As Thai critic Graiwoot Chulphongsathorn has observed, while Thai filmmakers of the 1990s such as Nonzee Nimibutr and Wisit Sasanatieng achieved wide pan-Asian success, their films also appealed to local audiences because their themes were perceived as being very 'Thai'.[126] These films dealt with subjects such as Thai history in Tanit Jitnukul's *Bang rajan* (2000), the use of folklore in Nonzee's *Nang Nak (*1999), Thai literature in his *Jan Dara* (2001) and Thai popular culture in Wisit's *Tears of the Black Tiger* (*Fah talai jone*, 2000).[127] Perhaps most significantly, these films' appeal was also grounded in

Thai Film and Politics After 1997' in 'Ghostly Desires: Sexual Subjectivity in Thai Cinema and Politics after 1997' (PhD Thesis, Chicago, Illinois, December 2008), pp. 141 – 217; Anchalee Chaiworaporn, 'A Perceiver of Sense: Apichatpong Weerasethakul', (first published in the 11th Hong Kong Independent Short Film and Video Awards', April 2006.) ThaiCinema.org http://www.thaicinema.org/Essays_07apichatpong.asp [accessed 03.03.11]; Jihoon Kim, 'Between Auditorium and Gallery: Perception in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Films and Installations' in Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (eds.), *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 125 – 140.

[125] See Benedict Anderson, 'The Strange Story of a Strange Beast: Receptions in Thailand of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Sat Pralat' in James Quandt (ed.), *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009), pp. 158 – 177.

[126] Email correspondence with the author 03.04.11 and 04.04.11.

[127] Rachel Harrison's 'Amazing Thai Film: The Rise and Rise of Contemporary Thai Cinema on the International Screen' is particularly insightful in its analysis of the international successes of 'postmodern art house' Thai Cinema, discussing the work of former advertisers who moved into filmmaking following the 1997 crash, such as Nonzee Nimibutr, Pen-Ek Ratanaruang and Wisit Sasanatieng in the context of Thailand's national cinema, arguing that these filmmakers 'promote THAI to the outside world' and thus 'uphold the link between politics and national cinema established in its earliest days.' See Rachel Harrison, 'Amazing Thai Film: The Rise and Rise of Contemporary Thai Cinema on the International Screen', *Asian Affairs*, 36.3 (2005), p. 334. For a thoughtful analysis of *Nang Nak* as an example of the Thai heritage film, see May Adadol Ingawanij, 'Nang Nak: Thai Bourgeois Heritage Cinema', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8.2, (2007), pp. 180 – 193. In addition to Harrison's article, Glen Lewis's 'The Thai Movie Renaissance' also discusses the 'rise' of Thai cinema over the last decade. See Lewis, *Politics in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 146 – 172. See also Anchalee Chaiworaporn, 'New Thai Cinema', Cinemas of the South, FIPRESCI, 2006. http://www.fipresci.org/world_cinema/south/south_english_asian_cinema_thailand.htm [accessed 14.04.11] and Anchalee, 'A Brief History of Cinema in Thailand', Cinemas of the South, FIPRESCI, 2006, and Anchalee, 'The Alternatives' 01.01.04, Thai Film Foundation http://www.thaifilm.com/articleDetail_en.asp?id=33 [accessed 14.04.11] in which she provides an overview of alterative film culture in Thailand since 1997 until 2004.

their traditional linear narrative format. By contrast, Apichatpong's hybrid style of traditional storytelling, with its more experimental, modernist aesthetic, has had a much narrower appeal. However as Graiwoot notes, in essence Apichatpong's very simple narratives are also very 'Thai', and his supporters in Thailand are extremely proud of the global recognition he has achieved as a Thai filmmaker.

Secondly, as in Iran and China, film censorship has played a pivotal role in shaping film culture in Thailand, and has directly impacted the reception of Apichatpong's work there. Thailand's controversial Film Act has been the subject of considerable debate within Thai film circles since the 1980s, and its impact on the nation's film culture has been the subject of a handful of important essays. Annette Hamilton's 'Dilemmas of Representation in Thailand', for example, provides a historical perspective on state intervention in Thailand's film culture.[128] In this essay, she explains that during a brief spell of political optimism in late 1988 following the country's first democratic election for many years, filmmakers, frustrated by restrictions imposed on them by the Film Act, took part in a National Seminar on the Future of the Thai Film Industry held at Chulalongkorn University. This was a high-level meeting attended by a number of academics and representatives from the Public Relations Department, which, as Hamilton notes, controlled the 'various aspects of the media in Thailand' and was opened by the new Prime Minster Chartchai Choonhavan, who commented on the importance of cinema in the development of Thai culture and education. While this seminar demonstrated an acutely felt need for reform, progress was abruptly cut short by a military coup that ousted the elected government. This brought about further political uncertainty and introduced even tighter restrictions. According to Hamilton, these restrictions were

http://www.fipresci.org/world_cinema/south/south_english_asian_cinema_thailand_chronology.htm [accessed 14.04.11] For more recent accounts of contemporary alternative moving image culture in Thailand see David Teh's curatorial essay, 'The Art of Interruption: Notes on the 5th Bangkok Experimental Film Festival', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 25.7-8 (December, 2008), pp. 309 -320 and May Adadol Ingawanij, 'Observing Life's Remains' Internationale Kurzefilmtage Oberhausen, Festivalkatalog, 2009, pp. 99 – 101, as well as Kong Rithdee, 'From Pusan: Mundane History and New Thai Cinema', *Bangkok Post***, [**12.10.09]
http://www.bangkokpost.com/blogs/index.php/2009/10/12/from-pusan-mundane-history-and-new-new-t?blog=69 [14.12.09]
128 Annette Hamilton, 'Dilemmas of Representation in Thailand', in Wimal Dissanayake (ed.), *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 141 – 161. See also Annette Hamilton, 'Video Crackdown, or The Sacrificial Pirate: Censorship and Cultural Consequences in Thailand', *Public Culture* 5 (1993), pp. 515 – 531.

based on the 1930 Cinema Act that 'permits the banning of a production or the confiscation of a film if it is believed to be harmful to the general public', including films that show acts of lèse majesté (the long standing law that forbids criticism of the Thai royal family), insult Buddhism or that 'may discredit the present government system or stir up violence', as well as films that are considered obscene by the board.[129]

In late 2006, the Film Act came under further scrutiny when the Ministry of Culture rushed through a revised draft along with several other authoritarian laws after the royalist coup of September 2006 that ousted Prime Minster Thaksin Shinawatra. According to May Adadol Ingawanij in her essay, 'Disreputable Behaviour: The Hidden Politics of the Thai Film Act', these laws were ushered through just two days before the December 23rd 2007 general election in order 'to give this military and bureaucracy wide-ranging power to contain, ban and penalise anything or anyone deemed a threat to national security.'[130] May Adadol notes that at this time widespread public anger towards the military, the monarchy and the upper class manifested itself in a number of public incidents of lèse majesté on web discussion boards. The significance of this tense political atmosphere for understanding the politics behind the new Film Act it, she contends, cannot be overestimated.

It was against this backdrop that the censorship board requested that Apichatpong make four cuts from his film *Syndromes and a Century* (*Sang Sattawat,* 2006). He refused and instead decided to cancel the film's commercial release in Thailand, making the following statement:

> I, a filmmaker, treat my works as my own sons or my daughters. When I conceived them, they have their own lives to live. I don't mind if people are fond of them, or despise them, as long as I created them with my best intentions and efforts. If these offspring of mine cannot live in their own country for whatever reasons, let them be free. Since there are other places that warmly welcome them as who they are, there is no reason to mutilate them from the fear of the system, or from greed. Otherwise, there is no reason

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[129] The act was modified in 1932, 1962, and 1971. See ibid.

[130] May Adadol Ingawanij, 'Disreputable Behaviour: The Hidden Politics of the Thai Film Act' *Vertigo* 3.8 (Summer, 2008). See http://www.vertigomagazine.co.uk/showarticle.php?sel=bac&siz=1&id=927 [accessed 10.10.08].

for one to continue making art.[131]

When Apichatpong requested that the print be returned, the Board insisted that it would only do so if he agreed to make the cuts. This resulted in a great deal of anger amongst the independent film community, out of which grew the Free Thai Cinema campaign, organised by Apichatpong, the Thai Film Directors' Association, and the Thai Film Foundation, demanding modernisation of Thailand's 'archaic' film legislation.[132]

Apichatpong and other key figures from the campaign were invited to a seminar attended by a range of interested parties, including representatives from the Ministry of Culture, Committee of Proper Media, Federation of Film Producers Association of Thailand, Thai Film Directors' Association, Cineplex operators and industry observers to discuss their position. After the meeting, feeling like he and the Film Foundation had been invited as an appeasing gesture, he wrote an essay, 'The Folly and Future of Thai Cinema under Military Dictatorship', outlining his objections to the new bill – both in terms of its 'unfairness' and 'impracticality' – which was published by the Thai Film Foundation in November 2007.[133]

The main concern for Apichatpong was the clause that noted, 'Filmmakers must not make films that undermine social order or moral decency, or that might have an impact on the security or pride of the nation.' While Apichatpong notes that although this may seem straightforward, in actuality this kind of legislation has long been the cause of conflict between filmmakers and the authorities as to how such concepts are defined, as he writes: 'The underlying mentality of the law remains to exert control over our thoughts, the only difference being that this power to decide what is acceptable and what is not will be transferred from the police to a new agency to be set up under the Ministry of Culture.'[134] Other changes also meant that

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[131] Apichatpong Weerasethakul, cited in 'A Letter from the Free Thai Cinema Movement to The National Legislative Assembly and the Thai Government.' 16.04.07. FACT – Freedom Against Censorship Thailand. http://facthai.wordpress.com/2007/04/16/free-thai-cinema-movement-english/ [accessed 15.03.10].

[132] See http://www.kickthemachine.com/FreeThai/FreeThaiCinema.html [accessed 25.04.11]

[133] Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 'The Folly and Future of Thai Cinema under Military Dictatorship', Thai Film Foundation, 08.11.07 http://www.thaifilm.com/articleDetail_en.asp?id=106 [accessed 09.11.10]

[134] Ibid.

censorship issues would now be managed by the Culture Ministry as opposed to the police, which May Adadol observes is an organisation that actively encourages the 'disseminat[ion of] conservative images of Thainess' while censoring 'those who contradict them.'[135]

Although the new bill did introduce a ratings system, there remained the category of film agreed by the Federation of Film Producers and Cineplex operators that could be classed as unsuitable for screening in Thailand, specifically related to those that criticised or posed a threat to the Kingdom's three dominant institutions: the nation, the religion and the monarchy. This meant that the censorship board would still be able to request cuts to Thai films and withhold permission to screen films commercially in Thailand if their demands were not met.[136] Angered by the compliance of the Federation and cinema owners, Apichatpong argued that, 'Instead of questioning the authority and the people who use it, instead of promoting constructive debate for the sake of development, we are so ready to let the state silence us.'[137] Despite the filmmakers' protest, the final draft of the New Film Act corresponded with the wishes of the Ministry of Culture. It came into effect in 2008, while the ratings system was introduced in 2009, maintaining Articles 26 and 29, which allowed the outright banning of certain films deemed 'unsuitable' for Thai audiences.[138] As May Adadol notes, this patriarchal attitude, which argues that Thai audiences may not be 'ready' for certain themes and images used to justify state censorship, has long been part of conservative discourse in the kingdom. As she writes,

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[135] May Adadol Ingawanij, 'Disreputable Behaviour', op. cit.

[136] This legislation coincided with the board's decision to order of the removal of four scenes from Apichatpong's *Syndromes and a Century,* which the director refused. Instead, with support from several other key figures in Thailand's independent film scene, the director organised the 'Free Thai Cinema' campaign with the aim of reducing the state's power to ban and cut films.

[137] Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 'The Folly and Future of Thai Cinema under Military Dictatorship', Thai Film Foundation, 08.11.07 http://www.thaifilm.com/articleDetail_en.asp?id=106 [accessed 09.11.10]

[138] This law now extends to both domestic and international film exhibition as the new act enables the censorship board to control the circulation of Thai moving images abroad, as the content of both feature length and short films must now be vetted by the classification board prior to any public screenings. The board has the power to refuse permission for their exhibition, thus potentially criminalising filmmakers for showing their work abroad.

See also Sudarat Musikawong, 'Working Practices in Thai Independent Film Production', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies,* 8.2 (2007), pp. 248 – 261 and also Anchalee Chaiworaporn, 'Politics in Thai Film.' See http://www.thaicinema.org/Essays_06-politics.asp. [accessed 9.11.10]

During the last days of royal absolutism in the late 1920s, the monarch attempted to fend off the constitutionalists' demand for change with the claim that the people were not yet ready for democracy. What is historically consistent about such claims is that they create a fiction of a people dependent on elite leadership amidst a context of the crisis of the latter's authority and furious discontent from below. [139]

Following the success of Apichatpong's most recent feature film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) at Cannes last year, the film was released domestically and toured the country playing for three months. The attention this film has received has had a significant impact on independent film culture in Thailand, as there has been an increase in the number of local independent films being released over the last year (up from one or two in the previous years to seven) including Uruphong Raksasad's *Agrarian Utopia (Sawan baan na*, 2009), Anocha Suwichakornpong's *Mundane History* (*Jao nok krajok*, 2009) and Sivaroj Kongsakul's *Eternity* (*Tee rak*, 2010). The Thai government have also introduced a new film fund, which this year was awarded to *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* and Pen-Ek Ratanaruang's *Headshot* (2011), amongst other film and television projects.[140]

As I have described, Bahman Ghobadi, Jia Zhangke and Apichatpong Weerasethakul all produce work within the confines of a state that attempts to define the nation as a coherent and controllable entity. These filmmakers are connected by their desire to foreground a 'politics of voice' while working in a political and industrial climate where independent film culture has been actively suppressed. In 'giving voice' to the heterogeneous memories and experiences of those on the social and political margins of society, the films provide a counter-discourse to the dominant, homogenising rhetoric of the nation-state. Throughout this thesis, I will explore this idea in depth, drawing out themes that resonate across the works as I investigate how the concept of cinema's 'spectral sounds' can reveal a sense of the (disruptive) politics that are embedded in film form.

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[139] May Adadol Ingawanij, 'Disreputable Behaviour', op. cit.
[140] See Anchalee Chaiworaporn, 'International Film Guide: Thailand' www.internationalfilmguide.com/docs/2011/01/Thailand.pdf [accessed 15.04.11]

In the next chapter, I take up this theme as I explore the relationship between temporality, trauma and subjective sound in the films of Bahman Ghobadi. Drawing on the sound's material qualities – namely its evanescence, I suggest that there is a rich symbolic connection between what I call the 'belatedness' of sound and the *nachträglichkeit* of trauma. I also begin to suggest ways in which the films' highly subjective use of sound might encourages an intersubjective, empathetic and therefore ethical spectatorship that positions the audio-viewer as a witness to the films' testimonies of war.

Chapter Two

The Sounds of War in the films of Bahman Ghobadi

> The roar of the bombers and explosions has become part of the Kurdish music. We are so used to it that it does not terrify us anymore...War has turned into a melody ... It used to be a sad melody, but now we have heard it so often that we have learned to dance to it.
>
> – Bahman Ghobadi[141]

Trauma, Temporality and Subjective Sound

It is mid-winter on a remote hillside in Iranian Kurdistan. An old man's son stands waiting to be picked up by his father Mamo, a musician, but as the tour bus pulls in he insists he must speak to his father before boarding and takes him to the edge of the hillside to be alone with him. Mamo is unsettled by his son's strange behaviour – he is right to be concerned as his son goes on to tell him of a terrible premonition about the trip on which they are about to embark. On the soundtrack, a nondiegetic low melancholy drone begins, resonating through the acoustic space. As Mamo absorbs the news, the use of sonic delay and heightened bird song on the soundtrack creates an aural haze of exaggerated perception and sensorial confusion as the diegetic and non-diegetic sound worlds of the film merge. These sounds quieten as his son walks away and leaves the old man alone with his thoughts.

'Who wants to stop me?' he calls out to the mountains – his impassioned plea reverberating through the quiet stillness. A low, breathy chanting builds slowly to a steady rhythmic pulse. The man cries out: 'For all these years they've tried to stop me. This time I won't let them.' As he calls out defiantly, the rhythmic acousmatic voices reach a crescendo. The subjective camera scans the stark and seemingly indifferent mountains but as his own words echo back to him it is as though the mountains themselves have answered: the audio rhythm of the scene endowing this inanimate backdrop with a heartbeat and a rush of blood. In reality the echo sounds back to Mamo because his voice bounces around an empty space,

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[141] Bahman Ghobadi interview with Jamsheed Akrami **[**23.04.04**]**
http://www.newrozfilms.com/ghobadi_interview_by_jamsheedakrami.htm [accessed 18/08/06]

and no one answers him because no one is listening. As these sounds die away, a delay effect on the soundtrack leaves ghostly traces in the air as Mamo says prophetically, 'I have to go even if it kills me.'

This scene, which occurs early on in Bahman Ghobadi's fourth feature film, *Half Moon* (*Niwemang*, 2006) highlights the central role of sound in his films – as voice, as music and as soundscape, weaving these key strands together in a visual and aural synecdoche. The film, a magic realist road movie inspired by Mozart's requiem, was commissioned as part of the New Found Hope festival to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. It tells the story of an old musician's final journey across the border from Iran to Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein to perform for the first time in thirty-seven years. As the film progresses, Mamo's failing health becomes more and more apparent as he resolutely determines to continue despite treacherous conditions and oppressive border controls. Just as Mozart's final composition heralded his own death, Mamo's journey is plagued by premonitions of his own mortality – warned by his son of a wise-man's vision of disaster on the fourteenth day of the month.

This chapter explores the acoustemology of Ghobadi's films in order to investigate how sound is used to situate characters and express subjectivity and agency in the films' historical setting of Kurdistan following the Iran-Iraq War.[142] Steven Feld defines acoustemology as the study of 'local conditions of acoustic sensation, knowledge and imagination, embodied in the culturally particular sense of place resounding.'[143] Feld's approach privileges '[t]he potential of acoustic knowing, of sounding as a condition of and for knowing, of sonic presence and awareness as potent shaping forces in how people make sense of experiences.'[144] Using Feld's approach as an overarching methodological framework throughout this thesis, my analyses of the films will be 'acoustemological' in that they will explore sound's (and listening's) epistemological potential and will consider the films in terms of the different ways that they articulate the historical, cultural and material dimensions of sound.

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[142] Steven Feld, 'A Rainforest Acoustemology', in Michael Bull and Les Back (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader* op. cit., p. 226.
[143] Steven Feld, 'Places Sensed, Senses Placed: Toward a Sensuous Epistemology of Environments' in David Howes (ed.), *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 179.
[144] Ibid., p. 185.

War films celebrated for their use of sound, such as *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979), *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998), *The Thin Red Line* (Terrence Malick, 1998) and more recently *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008), have tended to focus on the subjective and phenomenological experience of war from the perspective of soldiers, whose agency and placement within the very centre of the action drives the film's narrative. As Mark Kerins has noted, this point of audition and spectatorial alignment is usually manifested and facilitated through the use of immersive surround sound.[145] Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker*, for example, set during the American occupation of Iraq, won Academy Awards for best sound editing and mixing in 2010. While in many ways more restrained than that of the Normandy landing scene in *Saving Private Ryan* (and certainly less visceral), in scenes of dramatic tension, the sound design in *The Hurt Locker* remains unwaveringly tied to the perspectives of Sergeants James and Sanborn and Specialist Eldridge – members of an elite army bomb squad and the central protagonists of the film.[146] In these scenes, while the men negotiate the extremely dangerous task of de-activating bombs while under constant threat of attack from insurgents, the sound design uses rhythm and timbre to convey their heightened state of mental and sensory awareness while simultaneously creating dramatic tension by drawing the audio-viewer into the world of the narrative.[147]

By contrast, Ghobadi's films, which also take place following the Iran-Iraq conflict, record the experience of war from the perspectives of those whose lives have been radically and violently disrupted by it, but who have had no active role in shaping

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[145] See Mark Kerins, *Beyond Dolby (Stereo): Cinema in the Digital Sound Age* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011). See especially Chapter 3: 'The Look of 5.1: Visual Aesthetics', pp. 84 – 111. Kerins notes some important differences in this use of sound in the blockbuster war film however. While *Saving Private Ryan* records events from the centre of the action, *Apocalypse Now* and *The Thin Red Line* film primarily from outside the main battle area, thus maintaining a slight sense of distance from the action (see p.108). Furthermore, *The Thin Red Line* does allow for varying viewpoints including perspectives offered from Japanese soldiers and women. See also Debra White-Stanley, ''Sound Sacrifices': The Postmodern Melodramas of World War II' in Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (eds.), *Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), pp. 218 – 232.

[146] See Stan Link, 'Nor the Eye Filled with Seeing: The Sound of Vision in Film', *American Music*, 22.1 (Spring 2004), pp. 76 – 90 and Janet Walker, 'The Vicissitudes of Traumatic Memory and the Postmodern History Film' in E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang (eds.), *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004) pp. 123 – 144.

[147] The sound designer for *The Hurt Locker* was Paul N.J. Ottosson; the film's score was composed by Marco Beltrami and Buck Sanders.

its outcome. As Dimitris Eleftheriotis writes in *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement*, 'Caught up in the middle of a war involving two other nations but unfolding partially over their land, the Kurds had no stakes in the Iran-Iraq conflict and no recourse to a protective state apparatus.'[148]

As Eleftheriotis notes, the defining event of this historical period stems back to the Iraqi attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja, which took place on March 16th and 17th 1988, after eight years of the conflict. Iraq dropped chemical weapons including mustard gas, tabun, sarin and VX gas on the city, which was then held by Iranian troops and Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas allied with Tehran. The attack killed an estimated five thousand people, leaving many thousands more with long-term health problems. After it was over, the Iraqi army entered Halabja and dynamited the town. As Eleftheriotis describes, this deeply traumatic event forms the backdrop to the Ghobadi films I discuss here and to Samira Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards* (*Takhté siah*, 2000), becoming an 'abstract symbol of the homeless and powerless existence of the endlessly travelling characters of the narratives.'[149]

While Eleftheriotis claims that, unlike the protagonists in the conventional road movie, '*Blackboards* systematically resists or renders irrelevant the subjectivity embodied in the mobile vision of the travellers', this chapter argues that while often touching on very similar themes to Makhmalbaf's film, Ghobadi's films by contrast, do foreground the subjectivity and agency of the characters – primarily I suggest, through the use of sound. There is an important distinction to make, however, as unlike the conventional journey (or quest) narratives described in *Cinematic Journeys*, Ghobadi's films are not concerned with the (ultimately introspective) forward-moving trajectory 'of exploration, discovery and revelation' – that is to say, they do not depict journeys of self-discovery.[150] I argue, rather, that as narratives primarily about trauma and survival they do not follow a linear trajectory but are infused with a sense of temporal 'belatedness' – Freud's *nachträglichkeit* – rendered through the films' use of sound.

Defining trauma in terms of the 'structure of its experience', Cathy Caruth argues that 'the [traumatic] event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time,

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[148] Dimitris Eleftheriotis, *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 152.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.

but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.'[151] This is

due, she suggests, to the paradox that 'in trauma the greatest confrontation with

reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically

enough, may take the form of belatedness.'[152] That is to say that the traumatic event

is defined by the fact that it is not fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence

but through a kind of haunting that manifests itself in repetition and involuntary

flashbacks as the individual attempts to come to terms with that which he or she has

experienced. In this way, Caruth asserts, '[i]t is fully evident only in connection with

another place, and in another time.'[153] In other words, for Caruth, trauma is

experienced both non-chronologically and through multiple time frames – while

remembered in the *present* it is always done so in relation to events from *another*

place and time in the past.

Caruth argues that because of the disjunctive temporality of trauma, one of

the ways this 'coming-to-terms' can be achieved is through its narrativisation,

whereby the trauma victim is able give their fragmented experience form (in an

attempt to make sense of it) as they relate their story to a listener. As she writes,

'The history of trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the

listening of another.'[154] In his essay, 'Postmodernism as Mourning Work', Thomas

Elsaesser explores this idea further in relation to audio-visual media, and he suggests

that the connection Caruth makes here between latency and narrative brings into

focus the inherent differences between 'psychic temporality and linear chronological

time.'[155] Arguing that the former relates to what he calls 'memory time' and the

latter to 'historical time', he suggests that trauma theory attempts to bridge the two

as it 'tries to re-think…the relation of subjectivity to history, across the act of

narration.'[156] This opens up an interesting framework for thinking about films that

deal with trauma and subjectivity – an area that has received a great deal of

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[151] Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4. See also Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991), pp. 181 – 192.
[152] Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, op. cit., p. 6.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 11.
[155] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Postmodernism as mourning work', *Screen* 42.2 (Summer 2001), p. 197.
[156] Ibid., p. 197.

attention in film studies over the last two decades. However, while much of this work has focussed on the visual and narrative aspects of film – particularly in relation to editing – the role of film sound here still remains underexplored.[157]

Sound, Temporality and the War Film

In this chapter then, I want to take up some of the ideas raised by Caruth and Elsaesser in relation to 'memory time and historical time' through close analysis of the sound design of Ghobadi's films. As several sound theorists have commented, both the material properties of sound and the experience of listening have an interesting and quite specific relationship to temporality. For example, in his essay 'Sounding Out Film', Steven Connor notes,

> There is always something belated about auditory identification, partly because the nature of sound is to occupy a passage rather than instant of time, duration, rather than a moment. In order to hear a sound, one must have already heard it start to decay, or come to an end; one must already have started finishing hearing it.[158]

Connor's words resound with those used by Caruth to describe the 'belatedness' of trauma as they emphasise the uncanny temporality of the acoustic experience. The durative nature of both suggests a different perception of time from the linear chronology of Elsaesser's 'history time'. Like trauma, sound resonates in our imaginations and through our bodies – it is not fully experienced at the exact moment of its happening, but later, as its impact on both our minds and our bodies is felt in another time and place.

Sound's relationship to temporality with regards to cinema is discussed further by Michel Chion in his *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*. Here Chion suggests that 'one of

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[157] See Susannah Radstone, 'Trauma and Screen Studies: Opening the Debate', *Screen*, 42.2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 188 – 193; Janet Walker, 'Trauma Cinema: False Memories and True Experience', *Screen*, 42.2 (Summer, 2001) and E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang (eds.), *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations (*Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004).
[158] Steven Connor, 'Sounding Out Film' (an extended version of a paper given at the conference on Film, Literature, and Modernity, the Institute of English Studies, London, 13-15 January 2000. http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/soundingout/ [accessed 3.03.08]

the most important effects of added value relates to the perception of time in the image, upon which sound can exert considerable influence.'[159] He identifies three ways that sound 'temporalizes images':

> The first is temporal animation of the image. To varying degrees, sound renders the perception of time in the image as exact, detailed, immediate, concrete – or vague, fluctuating, broad. Second, sound endows shots with temporal linearization…[as] synchronous sound…impose[s] a sense of succession. Third, sound vectorizes or dramatizes shots, orientating them toward a future, a goal, and creation of a feeling of imminence and expectation.[160]

Chion's description here of sound's effect on the image and on narrative seems quite perfunctory as he himself goes on to describe occasions where the image may have its own sense of temporal 'animation or vectorization', such as scenes where there is movement of water, smoke, light, or movement within or of the frame (what he calls 'visual microrhythms'[161]). This caveat makes his argument (as it stands) somewhat redundant as these (exceptional) conditions seem to describe elements that are most common to narrative cinema. It is perhaps more accurate (or helpful) to say that sound *adds temporal rhythm* to film – and that is not to say that the image does not have its *own* rhythm(s). While synchresis harmonises the rhythms of sound and image, the use of nonsynchronicity or asynchrony (where sound does not merely *underscore* the temporality of the image but adds a further dimension to it) opens up film's potential to articulate the *subjective experience* of space-time. This was recognised as early as the 1920s with the 'dawn of sound' in cinema in the film writings of Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin. In his 1929 essay, 'Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film' for example, Pudovkin argues that

> always there exists two rhythms, the rhythmic course of the objective world and the tempo and rhythm with which man observes this world. The world is a whole rhythm, while man receives only partial impressions of this world through his eyes and ears and to a lesser extent through his very skin. The tempo of his impressions varies within the rousing and calming of his emotions,

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[159] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 12.
[160] Ibid.,
[161] Ibid., p. 17.

while the rhythm of the objective world he perceives continues in unchanged tempo.[162]

For Pudovkin, then, the expressive potential of sound lies in its ability to provide a counterpoint to the image (producing a mode of 'dual address') where the film is able to communicate something of the complexity of the human experience by depicting the subjective experience of space-time as being at odds with that of the objective world through which the protagonists of a film move.

Chion himself identifies a *disruptive* potential in sound as he suggests that, 'by its very nature' (its material quality but also how it is produced and received), sound 'necessarily implies a displacement or agitation, however minimal.'[163] This idea is pursued by Brandon LaBelle in *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* as he explores its implications in relation to the lived experience of space-time. He argues that the movement of sound 'brings the original source from there to here' through a series of 'material frictions or vibrations' and thus creates 'the feeling of a progression'. Yet with the echo, he argues that this process ('the passing of sound') is disrupted:

> [T]he echo displaces the linear relation of origin and horizon, past and future, by prolonging the sound event to the point where it takes over; it overwhelms by turning the time of sound into a spatial dimension – the echo moves into space to replace it with its own compounded and repeating energy. The ruptures performed by the echo thus unfix the temporality of sound to further the integral displacement sound comes to impart on the senses.[164]

For LaBelle, therefore, the echo renders the experience of space-time disorientating and confusing. Sound is no longer merely temporal, but also spatial and dynamic. Here the echo takes the symbolic connection between sound and trauma's 'belatedness' to a further degree – as, similarly haunted by an occurrence *in a different place and time*, sound's uncanny return in the echo replicates the repetitive and non-linear nature of psychic trauma that returns 'unbidden' in the memory of the trauma victim at different points in time. The 'echo scene' in *Half Moon* that I described at the beginning of this

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[162] V. I. Pudovkin, 'Asynchronism as a Principle of Sound Film' in Elizabeth Weis and John Belton (eds.), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 87 – 88.
[163] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, op. cit., pp. 9-10.
[164] Brandon LaBelle, *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* (New York and London: Continuum, 2010), p. 7.

chapter is particularly forceful, as it demonstrates a moment where the belatedness of both trauma and sound converge. It is this important symbolic connection that I will use as a framework through which to analyse the relationship between sound and time across Ghobadi's work.

In distinction from the war films described at the beginning of this chapter, this study situates Ghobadi's work alongside a smaller group of (non-American) films that deal with the impact of war on the lives of civilians rather than on those characters who have a role (however small) in its outcome. These films similarly use sound to articulate a sense of fragmented subjectivity and powerlessness through techniques such as subjective point-of-audition, close-perspective miking, and non-synchronous sound and image, and include films such as *Bashu: The Little Stranger (Bashu, gharibeye koochak*, Bahram Beizai, 1990), *Mirror (Zerkalo*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 1975) and *Come and See (Idi I smotri,* Elem Klimov, 1985).[165]

Karen Lury has discussed the sound design of several of these films (which, like *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Turtles Can Fly*, all have children as their central protagonists) in her book *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales.* Here she offers a perceptive analysis of the use of sound in another film about war, *La Jetée* (Chris Marker, 1962) that also elucidates my own way of thinking about the significance of sound's relationship to temporality and the image in this group of films:

> The sound, detached, or relieved of its normal function, achieves a solidity and a symbolic complexity aside from, or over and above its relation to the image. This creates a series of effects in relation to the experience and understanding of time…The felt gap between sound and image allows for a play with or a suspension of linear historical temporality.[166]

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[165] For an interesting analysis of the use of sound *in Bashu, The Little Stranger* see Negar Mottahedeh, Chapter 1: 'Nationalizing Sense Perception, Bahram Bayza'i' in Negar Mottahedeh, *Displaced Allegories: Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 15 – 88. For a thought-provoking discussion of sound in *Mirror* and *Come and See* see Karen Lury, Chapter 3: 'Mud and Fairytales: Children in Films about War' in Karen Lury, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales* (London and New York, I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 105 – 144. See also Tollof Nelson, 'Sculpting the End of Time: The Anamorphosis of History and Memory in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975), *Cinémas: Journal of Film Studies*, 13.3 (2003), pp. 119 – 147 and Tyrus Miller, 'The Burning Babe: Children, Film Narrative, and the Figures of Historical Witness' in Ana Douglas and Thomas A. Vogler (eds.), *Witness and Memory: the Discourse of Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 207 – 232.
[166] Karen Lury, *The Child in Film*, op cit., p. 115.

Like several of the films Lury describes, the soundscapes of Ghobadi's rural films[167] are all in some ways 'occupied' acoustic spaces dominated by the sound of Iraqi fighter jets that punctuate and fragment the acoustic space that might in other times have been largely characterised by pastoral sounds.[168] Despite the omnipresence of these sounds of occupation, other sounds emerge in these films such as music and the spoken word that orchestrate a complex heterogeneous space that foregrounds the subjectivity of the films' characters. By amplifying these voices, Ghobadi's films draw on the acoustemology of embodied memory to present an alternative to the dominant accounts of this troubled period in Kurdistan's recent past. As Lury suggests, the 'felt gap' between sound and image that occurs at different points in these films disturbs the linear temporality of dominant historiography and in so doing, I argue, opens up a space for the subjective (belated) space-time of trauma.

History and Ghosts

The troubled history of Kurdistan over the last century provides a crucial backdrop to Ghobadi's films. This is perhaps made most evident in *Half Moon*, which draws heavily on symbolism to convey Kurdistan's fragile position in regional (and global) geopolitics as a stateless nation. *Half Moon* articulates this sense of physical powerlessness in the way it introduces to us its central character, Mamo. While in the film's opening scene (described at the beginning of this chapter), his words communicate a sense both of anger and resilience, this defiant mood is undercut by the use of ambient sound, which foregrounds a symbolic association between sound and the failing, aged body – a trope that is developed further as the action moves from the mountainside to a village location where Mamo goes to see a Holy Man at the start of his journey.

As the sound of non-diegetic chanting builds, it joins with the diegetic beat of drums while the image cuts to a large crowd at a ceremonial gathering in a village

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[167] Those before *Persian Cats.*
[168] See Selmin Kara, 'Reassembling the Nation: Iraq in Fragments and the Acoustics of Occupation', *Studies in Documentary Film*, 3.3 (2009), pp. 259 - 274 for an interesting analysis of sound in relation to occupation.

(the costume of the villagers signalling the setting is still in Kurdistan). The image is slowed, imbuing the scene with a dream-like, otherworldly quality. As Mamo enters a dark interior and sombrely makes his way around the space, steam rises around him, its intangibility embodying a sense of both presence and non-presence in that moment. Reverb fills the acoustic space, creating a sense of a metaphysical plane more expansive than the space-time of the diegesis, as each sonic layer builds on the one before it like ripples across water. Here Mamo's fading health becomes more apparent as the narrow strips of sunlight flooding through the small windows traverse the dark shadows – his encumbered movement through this symbolic space mirroring the precarious path he treads between life and death as he begins the hazardous journey across the border to Iraqi Kurdistan.

The scene has an elegiac quality created in part by the mournful sound of a man and a woman's voice singing a lament. As the image cuts abruptly to a group of men violently shaking their hair in a traditional Kurdish ceremonial dance, the intensity of the scene reaches a pressure point as the multi-layered sounds – the accelerating rhythm of the drums, the sound of wind instruments and the chanting builds again to a crescendo. These sounds seem to have particular symbolic resonance, embodying acoustically the heartbeat, breath and muscularity of the human body – perhaps signalling the relationship between cultural performance and embodied memory.[169]

The suggestion made here on the soundtrack of a visceral, breathing body is contradicted by the image, which repeatedly presents Mamo's own frail body as lifeless. This connection is made as the image projects forward (or flashes back – its temporal logic is deliberately ambiguous) to a scene from later in the film where he lies in a coffin – his pale, soil-strewn body seeming to be part of the earth itself even before death. This powerful image becomes a recurrent visual motif of the film, creating a pervasive sense of temporal uncertainty throughout the narrative. Even while Mamo is still alive, he is a ghost figure. Mamo's physical frailty can be seen to

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[169] The relationship between cultural identity and music has been discussed in several publications, and while there is much to be said about this connection in Ghobadi's films, it is not the focus of this thesis. See for example, Simon Frith, 'Music and Identity' in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 108 – 127 and Sheila Whiteley, Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins (eds.), *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2005).

embody the fragility of Kurdistan's physicality (its disputed position on the map and its marginalised place within dominant nationalist discourses). In a further use of disjunctive sound and image, however, the insistent rhythm of the drumbeat on the soundtrack and the heightened emotion of the song that we hear do not convey a sense of grief as we might expect from the image of Mamo as a corpse. On the contrary, the juxtaposition of these sounds against this haunting image seem to build on the defiant energy that emanated from Mamo's opening words at the beginning of the film, further complicating the 'disruptive' nature of the ghost imagery used in the film.

As Avery F. Gordon has suggested, 'The ghost is…a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life.'[170] Here the spectral figure of Mamo personifies Kurdistan and its fraught and complex relationship with history while at the same time foregrounding the sense of injustice experienced by Kurds over time. As Bliss Cua Lim has argued, the ghost figure disrupts and destabilises the linearity of dominant accounts of the past by evoking multiple, even divergent, temporalities: 'Haunting as ghostly return precisely refuses the idea that things are just 'left behind,' that the past is inert and the present uniform.'[171] Thus the recurrent image of Mamo as a corpse as seen through flash-forward (a device that encodes cinematically the historically disruptive notion of non-linear temporality) signals that the human rights violations suffered by the Kurds in the past continue to haunt the present through personal and social memory and suggests that these injustices are can never simply be 'left behind'. It is perhaps through the figure of Mamo and his determination to make the journey across the border, therefore, that symbolically the past may be 'exorcised' – not, as Derrida writes, 'in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right…to…a hospitable memory…out of a concern for justice.'[172]

The political, cultural and symbolic importance of the concert itself (the first to take place in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein) that motivates Mamo to undertake

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[170] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8.
[171] Bliss Cua Lim, 'Spectral Times: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory', *positions,* 9.2 (Fall 2001), p. 288.
[172] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx,* op. cit., p. 175.

this hazardous journey is made evident in an email press release he and his son write for the concert, which states:

> After all these years of the oppression of music, we find ourselves here to listen and to witness the rebirth of the roots of our music. To utter a cry of freedom of beauty, of life after the road we've come down…. After thirty-seven years, I can again see my occupied motherland and come with my sons to present to you a music of love, friendship, beauty and life.

Mamo adds that a 'celestial voice' will accompany them, telling his son to write: 'A voice that has been lost all of those years…a voice that was killed, an extinct voice.' The 'extinct voice' that Mamo refers to is that of Hesho, an Iranian woman singer who had been exiled for singing in public; but clearly she is also a symbolic figure who stands for the repression of all women's voices in the Iranian public sphere since women's public performances were banned following the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In his bid to bring Hesho with him to perform in Iraq, Mamo visits a small hillside town where we learn that over a thousand women singers have been exiled – and where they hear the voice of 'all 1334 women singing' as if it were just 'one voice,' Mamo notes. As he arrives at the village, it is framed in long shot and its dusty, earthy tones blend in with the landscape so much so that at first it is barely noticeable in the distance. On the soundtrack, the soft, melancholy sound of women singing seems to hang in the still air, the stillness acoustically embodying their physical state as their freedom of movement is restricted. As Mamo makes his way down to the village (he has bribed a guard to let him in), the image cuts to a shot of the women standing and waiting for him holding dafs (a traditional Kurdish drum) in their hands ready to perform, their colourful clothing contrasting vibrantly against the monotonal landscape around them. Mamo walks with Hesho through their midst as they perform a rousing song. Although the lyrics are unsubtitled, the strong pulse-like beat of the percussion and the timbre of their voices singing in unison, like the musical performance described above, reinforces a powerful sense of defiance.

In some respects, however, Hesho's voice is symbolic of the past – both in terms of Mamo's personal memories but also the Kurds' historical experience of

oppression. Mamo and Hesho's music therefore presents a kind of figurative haunting. This is suggested through an uncanny use of sound later in the film when Mamo and his sons visit a café where the proprietor puts on one of their cassettes. Through repeated play the tape has become old and worn out and has a hissy, muffled sound that emphasises its aged materiality. This weathered tone lets it sit comfortably and unassumingly amidst the ambient sounds of the everyday goings on of the café, such as the clinking of teacups and the soft background conversations. As Mamo listens to the music, however, he begins to feel unwell, a feeling inferred through an audible shift in the soundtrack itself. The tonal quality of the cassette and the diegetic café sounds take on an unsettling feel when the music morphs into the low guttural sound of air bubbling through a qalyoun (a water pipe) as a man sits smoking a few seats away. This exaggerated sound is an audio trigger, which marks a change in the mood of the scene; the bubbling sound is slowed down, stretching both the sound's temporality and the acoustic space from the literal to the symbolic, from the external objective, to the internal subjective.[173]

Similarly, other sounds, which had occupied the background space (such as the rolling of dice in a blackjack game), become exaggerated and now occupy the foreground of the soundscape expressing Mamo's psychological state and sensory confusion through sonic distortion. This effect is further underscored when the clicking sound of the dice bouncing off the blackjack board morphs into the homophone of a woman's necklace swinging across her chest as she drags a coffin through deep snow in another of Mamo's prophetic visions. While the use of delay and echo in the earlier scene by the mountainside seemed to emanate from *outside* of Mamo's body, here the use of dissonant sound stresses Mamo's interiority and serves to further emphasise the materiality of his body, and its fragility.

The justice Derrida speaks of in *Spectres of Marx* is long overdue for the Kurds, and it is no coincidence that Ghobadi adopts the metaphor of the sick body through which to explore Kurdistan's future. Although not an officially recognised

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[173] Michel Chion writes: '*Internal sound* is sound which, although situated in the present action, corresponds to the physical and mental interior of a character. These include physiological sounds of breathing, moans or heartbeats, all of which could be named *objective-internal* sounds. Also in this category of internal sounds are mental voices, memories, and so on, which I call *subjective-internal* sounds'; Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen,* op. cit., p. 76.

state itself, the word 'Kurdistan' has been used to describe the geographical area across the Zagros mountain range in the Middle East since the twelfth century. The majority of Kurds still live in this area, which stretches across southern Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iran and northern Syria. The map of Kurdistan is shown in *Half Moon* only briefly, but it is alluded to repeatedly throughout Ghobadi's films in which borders are represented as arbitrary dividing lines that are nothing more than symbols of state oppression.[174] As geographer Maria O' Shea describes in *Trapped Between the Map and Reality*, this region has long been the site of struggle. Largely due to its strategically useful geographical position, Kurdistan has always been a contested territory and consequently has seen long periods of unrest. The instability has escalated in recent times and as O'Shea notes, since the end of the First World War there has barely been a period of ten years during which Kurdistan has not been the site of armed conflict.

Historian Lokman I. Meho notes that in their attempt to suppress Kurdish identity, the surrounding states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria have 'not only used political oppression and economic exploitation, but also targeted cultural oppression.'[175] While the forms of this oppression have been varied, Meho argues that restrictions placed upon the Kurdish language have had the most damaging and far-reaching effect. In Turkey, until 2002, both the spoken and the written use of Kurdish were banned, and possession of written material in Kurdish was a serious crime punishable by a long-term prison sentence. Similarly, in Iran, from the end of the First World War speaking and writing in the Kurdish language was forbidden; and while since the 1990s Kurdish language publications and other cultural forms have become more widespread, the teaching of the Kurdish language in schools remains illegal. This is also the case in Syria, where broadcasting and publishing in the language are also prohibited. Iraq remains the only country of the four in which Kurdish is an officially recognised language.

In her article 'Vengeance and Violence: Kurdish Women Recount the War',

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[174] Key narrative events in these films either involve the crossing of the borders between Iran and Iraq or take place near the borders that break up Kurdistan. *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Marooned in Iraq* both end with an image of people at, or crossing over the barbed wire that separates state from state (as does Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards*).

[175] Lokman I. Meho, 'The Kurds and Kurdistan' in Lokman I. Meho and Kelly L. Maglaughlin (eds.), *Kurdish Culture and Society: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 6.

historian Shahrzad Mojab describes this oppression as an 'external war':

> The Kurds have been subjected to genocide, ethnic cleansing, linguicide, and ethnocide, i.e., the deliberate killing of their language and culture. I call this the 'external war,' i.e., a war imposed on all Kurds – men, women, and children – by four nation-states, which have forcibly incorporated Kurds into the state structure. These states use both physical and symbolic violence in order to assimilate Kurds into the dominant nation.[176]

The restrictions placed on the Kurdish language and on Kurdish culture described by Mojab, Meho and O'Shea have clear repercussions on the ways in which the past is documented. As these authors note, as a direct result of these restrictions there has been a distinct historiographical bias towards recording events from a non-Kurdish perspective. Throughout Kurdistan's violent past, O'Shea asserts, it is only the effects of the First World War that have been recorded with any detail (although even these accounts, she argues, omit significant details of the devastation that the war had on Kurdistan). Because the region has no state historian or official archive, the fact that the Kurds suffered huge losses as both combatants and civilians during this period is expunged in the historical accounts written from other national perspectives.

While the restrictions placed on the Kurdish language have obvious resonance with regards to questions of voice and empowerment (which I shall return to later) this leads us to question: What form can a people's history without an archive take? For Michel Foucault the archive is 'the set of rules which at a given period and for a given society define…the limits and forms of the sayable'.[177] This suggests that the archive is not a dusty vault hidden in a dark cellar somewhere but is the circulation of what he terms, 'discursive formulations' within particular sites of power *in the present*. Furthermore, as Carolyn Steedman writes in *Dust*, the archive is 'a way of seeing, or a way of knowing.' It is therefore also 'a symbol or form of power.'[178] Consequently, any attempt to build an archive in whatever form is an act of self-empowerment – a redefinition of the limits of 'what can be said'. Thus by foregrounding the subjective

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[176] Shahrzad Mojab, 'Vengeance and Violence: Kurdish Women Recount the War', *Canadian Women Studies*, 19.14 (2000), p. 89.

[177] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 59.

[178] Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 2.

experiences of the Kurds that have not just been marginalised but *actively suppressed* by neighbouring nationalist and colonial discourses, I suggest that Ghobadi's films begin to fill this gap.[179] Voice becomes more than the subjective soundings of an individual and begins to take the form of a discursive act.

The Archive and the Witness

Like sand disappearing through the hourglass, sound cannot be held still. As Walter Ong describes in *Orality and Literacy*,

> Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. It is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and it is sensed as evanescent…There is no way to stop sound and have sound. I can stop a moving picture camera and hold one frame fixed on the screen. If I stop the movement of sound, I have nothing— only silence, no sound at all.[180]

The evanescence of sound makes it a rich metaphor through which to explore the concept of unrecorded histories. Not only do Ong's words here describe the durative temporality of sound, they also suggest its fragility – a fragility that it shares with many 'minority histories'.[181] Importantly, while it is an evocative way of conceptualising sound's symbolic use in cinema, in literal terms this fragility does not extend to the presence of sound in film as the medium of the sound film has the capacity to 'hold onto' sound by capturing it so that this intangible past can be rewound and re-heard. This has significance in itself, however. As Mary Ann Doane describes in relation to the image in *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* while

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[179] There is an irony here however faced by 'minority cultures' and formerly colonised countries as Laura U. Marks has argued, 'Not only is the historical archive available primarily to the victors, but also it is often those in the land of the victors who have access to a culture lost by the vanquished. Hence the paradoxical ability of Western (or dominant cultures') activists to document atrocities that cannot be visualized, that are unavailable, to the people who suffered them.' Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 56. For Ghobadi, this irony lies in the fact that although he is celebrated amongst Kurds in the diaspora as a champion of his people, his films are subject to censorship in his native Iran.

[180] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 32.

[181] See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

for the spectator film is always experienced as if it is in the present, there remains 'a certain instability to the present tense of cinema as a result of its archivability and the consequent intrusion of historicity.' As she writes,

> [a]s soon as one is aware that a film can be viewed again – that this experience of presence can be repeated – it becomes a record, more precisely a specifically historical record (of its own performance, of its place in a cultural history, of its production/preservation of an event).[182]

Importantly, this 'archivability' of film has significant political implications as it can also be extended to the notion of film as testimony, allowing us to return to the question of voice – and specifically to Feld's idea of voice as evidence and authority. As Roger Hallas notes, 'film…allows for the testimonial act to be preserved beyond its moment of enunciation, and the reproducibility of the medium permits a broad dissemination of testimonial address.'[183]

As we have seen, through the use of music and performance *Half Moon* bears witness to the Kurds' cultural resilience as well as acting as a record of the mood amongst Kurds after the fall of Saddam Hussein. However, while at first glance the film's treatment of Kurdish culture appears conventional in that the music seems to reaffirm a sense of collective identity (the narrative flow often paused to present traditional Kurdish folk performances as a 'spectacle'), there is also a clear sense of ambiguity over the medium's ability to effectively capture or communicate it. This sense of 'doubt' is highlighted in a failed mise-en-abyme in which Mamo's son Kako attempts to film the musicians' journey, planning to sell the footage to a Kurdish television station as a documentary about the 'meeting of two great Kurdish musicians', Mamo and Kak Khahil. When later it transpires that although Kako has been filming for six or seven hours, there has been no tape in the recorder and all his work has come to nothing, there is an overwhelming sense of futility. On the one hand, Kako's desire to record this event suggests the Kurds' need to build an archive (similar to what Andreas Huyssen has referred to elsewhere as 'self-musealization') while also

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[182] Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) pp. 103 – 104.
[183] Roger Hallas, 'Sound, Image and the Corporeal Implication of Witnessing in Derek Jarman's *Blue*' in Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (eds.), *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 38.

demonstrating the importance of audio-video media as a means of recording vernacular or unofficial history.[184] On the other hand, the film seems to gesture extra-diegetically to the role of filmmaking more generally as it foregrounds the limitations of this practice – both formal and perhaps, industrial.

The role of music and performance is also central to Ghobadi's second feature film, *Marooned in Iraq Marooned in Iraq* (*Gomgashtei dar Aragh*, 2002)*,* which tells the story of another old musician's journey across the border to find his former wife and singing partner, Hanareh who fled to Iraq after the Islamic Revolution.[185] When Mirza receives word that she needs his help, he and his two sons set off to cross the border to Iraq – like Mamo and his sons, Mirza's two sons Audeh and Barat are also musicians. Although there are clear thematic parallels with *Half Moon*, the sense of violent dislocation experienced by the Kurds during the Iran-Iraq conflict is much more acute in this earlier film. *Marooned in Iraq* centres on the immediate aftermath of the Kurdish genocide ordered by Saddam Hussein, termed 'al-Anfal' ('spoils of war') by the Iraqis, in which over 1,200 villages were destroyed, and over 100,000 men, women and children killed. In this film (as in Makhmalbaf's *Blackboards*), it seems that the whole of Kurdistan is on the move, as people try to survive having lost their loved ones, homes and all of their possessions.

As in *Half Moon*, Mirza's journey in *Marooned in Iraq* bears witness to the various ways in which the war affected ordinary people in Kurdistan: distraught families grieve over recently discovered mass graves; villages are unrecognisable, desolate, and deserted. One man tells how the men of his village were all killed, while the women ran away in fear; another woman tells how the Iraqis 'hit us with chemical weapons [and] massacred all our sons and all our men.' Open to exploitation by the many thieves, smugglers, and opportunists that roam this liminal no-man's land, the refugees gather in camps and makeshift meeting places. These become temporary centres of trade and normality until the next air raid forces them to move on, as the sound of Iraqi fighter jets cuts through the air like a razorblade.

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[184] Andreas Huyssen refers to video recording as 'self-musealization' in his article, 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia', *Public Culture*, 12.1 (2000), p. 24.
[185] *Marooned in Iraq* was originally called *Songs of My Motherland* – a title that had to be changed due to pressure from the Iranian authorities who believed it to have separatist connotations.

Ironically (because of music's traditional association with movement), *Marooned in Iraq* suggests that it is only through musical performances that the Kurds seem to be able stop moving for a moment and gain a fleeting sense of normality. At an orphans' refugee camp, for example, when the teacher tells Mirza that the villages at the bottom of the mountain have all been destroyed and everyone has died, Audeh and Barat perform the song 'Hanareh' for the gathered children. While the children seem to enjoy the music – clapping along with its rousing rhythm – it also seems to offer them a momentary respite from other sounds, such as the noise of soaring jet planes overhead and a baby crying – a sonic layering that denotes the children's utter powerlessness in the middle of a war that they have no part in.

As with the musical performances in *Half Moon*, these scenes document the need to distance the self from the experience of trauma through song and the performance of cultural memory – what Kimberly Wedeven Segall calls the 'aestheticisation' of experience. In her article, 'Stories and Song in Iraq and South Africa: From Individual Trauma to Collective Mourning Performances', she argues that the 'cultural practices of rituals, songs, public storytelling, and funeral laments that perform the past in a new context emphasize the distinction between the traumatic past and present moment.'[186] While, as I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, sufferers of trauma often feel haunted by a past event, Segall's research suggests that folk performances, such as those presented in *Half Moon* and *Marooned in Iraq*, facilitate a level of autonomy and control (at least for the duration of the song) that allows the trauma victim to feel that the past has shifted meaning – suggesting that they can be released (even if only temporarily) from the fear of its return. Moreover, Segall argues, as part of this process the creation of *new* songs and poems as 'memory keepers' is an important component in the documentation of people's traumatic experiences, which might otherwise remain unacknowledged in official records.

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[186] Kimberly Wedeven Segall, 'Stories and Song in Iraq and South Africa: From Individual Trauma to Collective Mourning Performances', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25.1 (2005), p. 142.

Recent research in the field of Refugee Studies has suggested that the pressure to produce linear accounts of the 'nation-state' and the historical past has led to the marginalisation of the migrant figure by historians. As Philip Marfleet argues in his article, 'Refugees and History: Why We Must Address the Past', the refugee crises currently seen in places such as Iraq, Darfur, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and Somalia are part of the political fallout from colonial legacies and external interventions just as much as a result of local conflicts. As such, refugees are inextricably bound to the power struggles of global history from which they themselves have nothing to gain and everything to lose. Having lost not only their material possessions and loved ones, and denied access to their cultural and social heritage, refugees live in a state of historical and political limbo, while their presence at the centre of national power struggles is disavowed by these very discourses. As Trinh T. Minh-ha writes, 'Intensely connected with the history and the politics that have erupted to displace them, refugees are unwanted persons whose story…exposes power politics in its most primitive form.'[187] Refugee testimonies, such as those articulated in Ghobadi's films, therefore disrupt dominant discourses about history from a nationalist perspective. Thus by foregrounding these voices in *Marooned in Iraq* and another of Ghobadi's films, *Turtles Can Fly* (*Lakposhtha parvaz mikonand*, 2004), the films answer a call to reposition refugees as 'subjects' rather than 'mere ciphers' of history.[188]

Voice, Testimony and Affect

Clearly, the authority of 'film as testimony' does not lie in its ability to document 'truths' about the past, but in its capacity to record *how* people speak about or represent the past, enabling voices to emerge that have been actively suppressed by nationalist and colonial historiographies. According to Steven Feld, 'Voice is

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[187] Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Other than Myself/ My Other Self' in George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam (eds.), *Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 12.
[188] Philip Marfleet, 'Refugees and History: Why We Must Address the Past', *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 26.3 (2007), p. 145.

evidence, embodied as experiential authority, performed to the exterior or interior as a subjectivity made public, mirrored in hearing as public made subjective.'[189] For Feld, then, voice (and listening) collapses the boundaries of objective/subjective worlds; bearing its own authority, the voice communicates an epistemology of embodied memory through the words chosen (or not), and through the emotion sensed in its tone and timbre.

In political discourse, the voice has long had an important association with the assertion of agency and power. As Lisa Cartwright describes in *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*, '"Coming to voice" is a figure of speech in a range of political movements connoting the achievement of agency, usually belatedly or through a political struggle before which the individual or collective subject who speaks is understood to have been "silent" or "invisible."'[190] As Cartwright makes clear, the significance of voice in relation to suppressed or marginalised histories cannot be overstated – particularly in relation to the idea of 'belatedness' that she signals here (again having resonance with both the latency of trauma and the material properties of sound). Given the historic denial of the Kurdish voice in public discourse, it is perhaps no coincidence that the titles of a number of research papers published on the experiences of the Kurds during and after the conflict stress voicelessness and voicing as metaphors for political oppression and empowerment.[191] Similarly emphasising the ability to 'give voice to' but also equally, the *inability* to adequately put words to traumatic experience (the 'unspeakable' nature of trauma), Ghobadi's films draw on what Kate

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[189] Steven Feld, 'A Rainforest Acoustemology', in Michael Bull and Les Back (eds.), *The Auditory Cultures Reader*, op. cit., pp. 226 – 267.

[190] Lisa Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship*, op. cit., p. 6.

[191] The notion of voices providing evidence is crucial in the recovery of the disputed past, as documents such as *Unquiet Graves: the Search for the Disappeared in Iraqi Kurdistan* testify. This study foregrounds the importance of eye-witnesses' oral testimony (alongside forensic science) in tracing and accounting for the dead by drawing on interviews from a wide range of people with first hand experience of the Anfal genocide including survivors of mass executions and Iraqi gravediggers. It is through these oral testimonies that the silenced voices of 'the disappeared' can be heard once more. See Eric Stover, *Unquiet Graves: the Search for the Disappeared in Iraqi Kurdistan*, US: Middle East Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, 1992. Similarly, Choman Hardi's research project, 'Breaking the Circle of Silence about the Anfal Women: Towards Building a National Archive for Anfal', draws on oral testimonies from women survivors of Anfal whose stories she argues have been sidelined by dominant accounts of the genocide. Hardi stresses the importance of 'voice' in the creation of a national archive that is more truly reflexive of the people's experience. http://www.chomanhardi.com/research.html [accessed 12.10.09]

Mitchell has called elsewhere 'corporeal histories' representing the experience of trauma through sense memories – specifically through subjective hearing.[192]

An important aspect of Ghobadi's depiction of the experience of war is the prominence of the perspectives of children, whose voices carry the narratives of both *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Turtles Can Fly*. As Hamid Reza Sadr has discussed, for a number of reasons, children have often figured as central protagonists in Iranian film – particularly in post-revolutionary cinema where restrictions on the depiction of women's lives resulted in barriers to naturalistic storytelling. While child actors have frequently offered a way of negotiating difficult (or politically sensitive) material, in these films, Sadr argues, the child figure is often a symbol for wider societal problems rather than necessarily having any sense of agency in his or her own right.[193] In her essay 'Mud and Fairytales: Children in Films about War', Karen Lury makes a similar observation about the role of the child protagonist in the war film. Echoing Marfleet's description of the status of the refugee in dominant historiographies, she argues that in these films the child frequently becomes a 'cipher' through or against which the (adult) spectator can channel their own feelings of anxiety or fear, or even moral judgements, about the often very traumatic events they are witness to on screen. Here, she contends, 'one child's experience, or more accurately their presence as a small, emotive figure, can be used to "stand in" for many deaths. In these instances, the child's narrative function is effectively to act as a metonym for wider suffering.'[194] While it could be argued that Ghobadi's child protagonists perform a similar function as their suffering clearly relates to the wider suffering of the Kurds, I would claim that their placement at the very centre of these narratives, and most importantly, the articulation of their emotions and subjective experiences through the use of sound, create a much richer and more nuanced sense of these characters' interiority.

A Time for Drunken Horses for example, Ghobadi's first feature length film, chronicles the effect of war on children as it tells the story of an orphaned family

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[192] Kate Mitchell, 'Ghostly Histories and Embodied Memories: Photography, Spectrality and Historical Fiction in *Afterimage* and *Sixty Lights*' in *Neo-Victorian Studies*, 1.1 (Autumn 2008), pp. 81 – 109.
[193] See Hamid Reza Sadr, 'Children in Contemporary Iranian Cinema: When we were Children' in Richard Tapper (ed.), *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), pp. 227 – 237.
[194] Karen Lury, *The Child in Film*, op. cit., p. 107.

living in Baneh, a remote mountainous area of Iranian Kurdistan close to the border with Iraq. Like Ghobadi's later films, it demonstrates the importance of testimony in the transmission of 'minority' histories but significantly, in this film, much of the narrative is conveyed through the voiceover of a young girl named Ameneh, whose words guide the audience through the film and literally 'gives voice to' the unwritten, 'unofficial' history of the children's lives. The film originated as a short documentary entitled *Life in the Fog*, and these roots in documentary are evident in the mise-en-scène of the opening scene – the use of direct sound, naturalistic lighting, on-location setting, and non-professional actors. The low angled camerawork and placement of the microphone in this first scene emulates the child's perspective and point of audition, so the audio-viewer is immediately immersed both visually and sonically in the bustling day-to-day goings on of the marketplace. Importantly, it is through Ameneh's *voice* that we come to understand the images and sounds that we see and hear. Her simple, understated narration leads us through the film, and it is only through access to her thoughts and ways of perceiving the world that we are able to fully understand the degree of hardship that these children face on a daily basis.

The film begins with a blank screen against which the audience hears the voice of an unknown, unseen interviewer asking Ameneh about herself and her family. This technique of using sound rather than image to situate the film, immediately establishes a different sense of a hierarchy of knowledge between the visual and the aural. Mary Ann Doane suggests in her essay 'The Voice in Cinema' that the voice-over commentary in documentary acts as a 'disembodied voice' that is necessarily presented as removed from or distanced from the diegesis: 'It is its radical otherness,' she argues, that 'endows this voice with …authority.'[195] Furthermore, Doane explains, in the history of documentary, this voice has usually been male, and has gained a sense of power through its privileged 'possession of knowledge' and 'unquestioned activity of interpretation.'[196] Ghobadi's decision therefore to give this voice of 'authority' to a young girl in this film (which although a feature film continues many of the themes of

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[195] Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in the Cinema: Articulation of Body and Space', in Philip Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986,) p. 341.

[196] Ibid.

the documentary, *Life in the Fog*) immediately raises the possibility for a radical

alternative to the 'official' authoritative spokespersons of history.[197]

While this question of authority is an important one, I would like to consider in

more detail how the film's use of sound articulates a sense of Ameneh's subjectivity,

paying particular attention to the way that her voice is recorded. At the very

beginning of this chapter, I described how the conventional war film often uses

point-of-audition to situate the characters at the very centre of the dramatic action –

emphasising the phenomenological aspects of sound to ensure spectatorial

alignment with the soldiers' perspectives. In this scene in *A Time for Drunken Horses*,

point-of-audition works in the same way, but instead of embodying the perspectives

of American soldiers who occupy relative positions of power, here it aligns the

audio-viewer with the perspective of a child who has no power whatsoever in her

present circumstances. Furthermore, the sound crew's use of close-perspective

recording techniques means that her voice *feels* very close to us.[198] As Mick Hurbis-

Cherrier has described, in sound recording, close placement of the microphone to

the sound source (or voice) creates a 'warmer, more intimate sound [with] less

ambient noise intrusion.'[199] In this scene in *A Time for Drunken Horses*, I would agree

that the impression of physical closeness created by the use of close-miking brings

about a sense of intimacy between the character on screen and the audio-viewer –

facilitating an *empathetic engagement with Ameneh* rather than the distancing

'othering' process described earlier by Lury.

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[197] At other times in Ghobadi's work, however, the highly symbolic and sometimes idealised
representation of female vocalists in both *Marooned in Iraq* and *Half Moon* seem to offer a far more
conservative representation of women as a symbol for the nation and for the Kurds' oppressed
cultural heritage. This is problematic in a culture where gender oppression privileges such
abstractions over women's rights in lived society. See Shahrzad Mojab, 'Vengeance and Violence:
Kurdish Women Recount the War', *Canadian Women Studies*, 19.14 (2000), p. 89.

[198] The sound in this film was recorded by Mehdi Darabi and Mortesza Dehnavi.

[199] Mick Hurbis-Cherrier, *Voice and Vision: A Creative Approach to Narrative Film and DV Production*
(Amsterdam and London: Elsevier/Focal Press, 2007), p. 327. The directness of the sound and its
consistent volume created by this technique evokes a sense of closeness (even when visually the
sound source is framed at some distance away) that Rick Altman calls its 'for-me-ness' quality. For
Altman the technique lends 'a discursive 'feel' to images that seem to deny discursivity'. See Rick
Altman, 'Afterword: A Baker's Dozen on New Terms for Sound Analysis' in Rick Altman (ed.) *Sound
Theory, Sound Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 250. See also Rick Altman, 'The
Technology of the Voice', part 1, *Iris* 3.1 (1985), pp. 3 – 20 and part 2, *Iris*, 4.1 (1986), pp. 107 – 119.
For a more recent discussion on the use of voice recording methods and the voice in film and
television see Arnt Maasø, 'The Proxemics of the Mediated Voice' in Jay Beck and Tony Grajeda (eds.),
Lowering the Boom: Critical Studies in Film Sound (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008), pp. 36 – 50.

As mentioned earlier, this capacity of sound (and sound recording) to create a sense of intimacy by bridging physical distances has been addressed by a number of sound theorists.[200] In his essay, 'Theory of the Film: Sound', Bela Balazs describes the process with regard to the role of cinematic sound in spectatorial identification:

> Just as our eye is identified with the camera lens, so our ear is identified with the microphone and we hear the sounds as the microphone originally heard them, irrespective of where the sound film is being shown and the sound reproduced. In this way, in the sound film, the fixed, immutable, permanent distance between spectator and actor is eliminated not only visually…but acoustically as well. Not only as spectators, but as listeners, too, we are transferred from our seats to the space in which the events depicted on the screen are taking place.[201]

Taking Balazs' idea further, in addition to the affective quality of the voice, the blank screen at the beginning of *A Time For Drunken Horses* also means that as listeners, we cannot distance Ameneh's words from ourselves by attaching her voice to an image. Instead, the sound of her voice resonates *within us* as the feeling of closeness and intimacy creates the sensory impression of a personal history that stays with us throughout the film. It is not therefore, as Michel Chion posits through his conceptualisation of the I-voice (the unseen, acousmêtric narrator), that the audio-viewer *identifies* with the character and 'internalizes the voice *as their own*', but that (following Ong) as the listener *absorbs* the sound of the voice (through their bodies as well as their imaginations), the film suggests a process of reciprocality and sensory exchange.[202] This closeness, I argue, allows us to feel empathy.[203]

Importantly, the sense of the ''intersubjective relation' between film and spectator' is discussed by Doane in 'The Voice in Cinema' where she argues, 'The voice-over commentary and, differently, the interior monologue and voice-over flashback speak more or less *directly* to the spectator, constituting him/her as an empty space to be 'filled' with knowledge about events, character psychology,

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[200] See for example, Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), pp. 71 – 72

[201] Bela Balazs, 'Theory of the Film: Sound' in Elisabeth Weis and John Belton (eds.), *Film Sound: Theory and Practice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 125.

[202] Chion sees the I-voice as the audio equivalent of point of view camerawork.

[203] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 1991).

etc.'[204] Here, in contrast to the situation Lury describes, it is the *audio-viewer* – not the child protagonist – who becomes the 'cipher' or in Doane's words, the 'empty space' through which knowledge is channelled. It is thus through sound that Ghobadi's films foreground the relationship between the 'survivor-witness and the listener-witness.'[205] As the audio-viewer *interiorises* the sound of the voice, he or she transforms this embodied knowledge *through the act of listening* from an expression of embodied memory to testimony. Because testimony is concerned with 'the passing on of knowledge that might otherwise disappear', the political implications of this process of embodied transference are crucial to my argument but appear to be entirely absent from Chion's.[206]

In addition to Doane's writing on voice in film, more recently Lisa Cartwright has discussed the voice in relation to empathy and affect In her *Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child.* Cartwright draws on theories of affect as a method of communication found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, André Green and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. While her book focuses on the representation of deaf and mute girls and their mothers in post-war cinema, her exploration of intersubjectivity in film provides a useful framework through which to think about the 'listener-witness' relationship in cinematic spectatorship. In particular, Cartwright considers questions of compassion and morality as she begins to articulate a theory of 'projective empathy', and while, as Lisa Schmidt has observed, these ideas are not fully explicated in her analyses of the films, the spectatorial position evoked is one rooted in an ethical encounter with the film that might equally be applied to the experiences of watching Ghobadi's films.[207]

Cartwright proposes the idea of empathetic identification 'as an alternative to the model of identification that has presided in film theory for more than two decades.' [208] For Cartwright this process is not about 'feeling what the other feels,

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[204] Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in Film', op. cit., p. 169.

[205] Roger Hallas and Frances Guerin (eds.), *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 10.

[206] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, 'Introduction: Contested Pasts' in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 10.

[207] Lisa Schmidt, '*Moral Spectatorship: Technologies of Voice and Affect in Postwar Representations of the Child*: Review' in *The Velvet Light Trap*, 65 (Spring 2010), pp. 87 – 89.

[208] Lisa Cartwright, *Moral Spectatorship*, op. cit., p. 2.

imagining oneself to be the other', as in the psychoanalytic model of spectatorship put forward by Christian Metz, Jean-Louis Baudry and Laura Mulvey (and latterly, Chion), but is a 'radically intersubjective process' that is also 'multisensory in its enactment.'[209] For Cartwright, an empathetic engagement can be defined as 'the reflexive experience of awareness of the thoughts, emotions…or concerns of an other or others.'[210] The sense of concern that she describes here is evident in the films she discusses through the mothers' care for their daughters, and is a powerful and important element in the Ghobadi films – particularly those involving orphans (*A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Turtles Can Fly*), who lovingly care for each other in the absence of protective adult figures in their lives. Thus, empathy is seen to work diegetically, between characters, and transdiegetically, with the audio-viewer. I will develop further what Cartwright calls the 'multisensory' aspect of this process by focussing specifically on sound and hearing, and will explore these ideas in relation to *A Time for Drunken Horses* in an attempt to understand how the use of sound may produce an 'affective engagement' with the film allowing for this 'empathetic response'.[211]

Ameneh, and her older brothers Ayoub and Madi (who is physically disabled and suffering from a life-threatening illness), frequently go to the marketplace (where we first meet them) to find work. On this occasion, they get a lift back to Baneh in the back of a truck with several other children from nearby villages. As they start to make their long journey home, the truck is framed in long shot as it winds its way along the mountain road. In the back, two of the children start to sing a cappella in Kurdish, *'Life is making me older and bringing me closer to death by taking me around the mountains and valley'*. They sing with gusto, perhaps to stave off the bitter cold, while the truck's engine rumbles noisily beneath their strained voices. In

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[209] Cartwright, op. cit., p. 2. See Jean-Louis Baudry, 'Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus', *Film Quarterly*, 27.2 (1974-75), pp. 39 - 47; Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', *Screen*, 16.2 (Summer, 1975), pp. 14-76 and Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16.3 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 6-18.

[210] Ibid., p. 54.

[211] Karen Lury, 'Children in an Open World: Mobility as Ontology in New Iranian and Turkish Cinema', *Feminist Theory*, 11.3 (December, 2010), p. 285. Lury's essay explores these ideas in relation to affect and empathy in her discussion of a number of Middle Eastern films in which the child figure is the central protagonist, including Reha Erdem's *Times and Winds* (*Bes vakit*, 2006), and Hana Makhmalbaf's *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame* (*Buda as sharm foru rikht*, 2007), as well as *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Turtles Can Fly.*

A Modern History of the Kurds, historian David McDowall explains that 'the idea of Kurdistan for many Kurds is …characterized by an almost mystical view of 'the mountain', an imaginary as well as a real place.'[212] The mountains, he argues, are a key symbol of Kurdish identity and play a central role in several of the myths and folktales that surround Kurdish origins.[213] While the mountains form a constant backdrop to the action of these films and are a recurrent visual motif, rather than sentimentalising this relationship, through the motif of the journey, Ghobadi's films emphasise a sense of movement suggesting that here, the Kurds' relationship with the landscape is not static or fixed, but must constantly be reworked and renegotiated, and even perhaps struggled against. The boys' song works through this problematic relationship in its lyrics. As the boys sing, Ayoub comforts Madi by touching his hair and Ameneh kisses his cheek as if to protect him from their painful words.[214] Amongst the rest of the children on the back of the truck some listen quietly, one boy counts his earnings, and another blows into his hands in an attempt to warm them up, but no-one seems uplifted by the song itself.

Ominously, this scene is punctuated acoustically by the muffled sound of an explosion in the distance, at which Ameneh's voice-over begins again as she tells us that she is worried about her father who had been smuggling goods across the border that day. When they get back to their village, their sister's screams shatter the acoustic space and it soon transpires that their father had been one of several smugglers who had been killed that day trying to cross the border. After the news of

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[212] David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 3.
[213] See ibid., p. 4. See also Maria O'Shea, *Trapped Between the Map and Reality: Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 162, where she notes that the notion of the mountains as 'allies' in armed struggle has particular symbolic resonance:

> Such proverbs as 'the Kurds have no friends but the mountains' are well known, and certainly only their ability to melt into the mountains has allowed Kurdish organisations and armies to exist when pitched against state power. Many Kurds use the euphemism, 'in the mountains' to refer to time spent as a guerrilla fighter.

[214] Significantly (and in ways not dissimilar to the gestures of nonverbal care in the films that Cartwright discusses), the family constantly demonstrate their love for each other through touch. Later in the film when Ayoub tearfully leaves his eldest sister Rohine in Iraq with her new family, the absence of touch (Rohine carries her brother Madi and places him down on the snow when her new family rejects him and walks away, and Ayoub and his sister do not kiss or hug goodbye) seems to heighten the sense of sadness in the scene while also signifying the physical fragmentation of the family through the loss of their mother, father and now sister.

his death, the family sit together in stunned silence. Now orphaned (with their uncle unable to look after them because he already has eight children to provide for), it turns to Ayoub to take responsibility for the household. As they sit together without speaking, the diegetic acoustic space is fragmented by the sound of Madi tuning a transistor radio in and out. The different channels bleed into each other, creating a dissonant aural palimpsest. This flooding of unintelligible noise into the acoustic space becomes a dull drone to their ears as their numbed bodies attempt to absorb the news of their loss. As Ameneh's voice-over begins again, it orders the soundscape and gives structure to their fragmented thoughts, attempting to make sense of their shock. Juxtaposed against her commentary, providing a stark contrast to the intense subjectivity of the sounds described above, the familiar night-time chirping of crickets and dogs barking are heard in the background, as the objective natural world goes on as normal, indifferent to the knowledge that the children's lives will never be the same again.

This use of diegetic sound in place of the spoken word to convey a sense of the characters' emotional state when the characters themselves are unable to speak (for whatever reason) continues in the next scene, which begins the following morning with the sound of Ayoub's axe cutting down a tree for firewood. The landscape is unusually still and tranquil as the white snow glistens in the bright sunlight, luminescent against the clear blue sky. The austerity of the mountainous landscape, however, seems to mirror Ayoub's own enforced rite of passage. Here, we see a long sequence of fragmented shots of the surrounding environment – the stark, black shapes of solitary trees set against the white snow, edited so that each visual cut corresponds with the sound of Ayoub's axe as it cuts through the wood. On the soundtrack, the impact of the hard edge of the axe hitting the softness of the wood creates a deadened sound that resonates slightly around the space – a sound that again articulates a deep sense of subjectivity, as it seems to embody the numb hollowness of shock and sudden grief, moving from the 'external-objective' to the 'internal-subjective'.[215] Ayoub then makes his way home carrying the heavy wood on his back, which is almost the same size as him, emphasising the fact that although he

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[215] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen,* op. cit., p. 76.

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is still a child, he has no option but to carry the burden of adult responsibility and there is little point protesting against the injustice of his newfound situation.[216]

Turtles Can Fly, Ghobadi's third feature film, also foregrounds the experiences of children and similarly uses sound to express the subjective experiences of the protagonists when words fail. The film portrays life in a Kurdish community that resides alongside a refugee camp in Northern Iraq on the border with Turkey, just before the US led invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein in the spring of 2003. The central character is a young teenager called Satellite (so-called because he installs satellite dishes for local villages so they can keep up with news of the immanent invasion) who looks after both the local orphans and those stranded in the refugee camp by providing them with work. This work, however, is extremely treacherous as they make their living selling undetonated landmines, firstly to the local representative from the United Nations, and then, when they discover he will pay more, to an arms dealer.

Through its portrayal of a young girl's experience of rape, and the emotional and physical effects of the war on her and her brother, the film highlights the inadequacy of language in expressing trauma and the silences that emanate from these suppressed histories. The first few moments of the film, before the title sequence begins, show the girl, whose name is Agrin, standing on the edge of a cliff. She looks behind her for a moment, and the film cuts to a shot of a person's shadow reflected onto a pool of water as they pass by. It then cuts back to the moment Agrin jumps to her death. Like the scene described earlier in *Half Moon* where Mamo walks through shadows as steam rises up around him, the immateriality of the shadow reflected on water evokes a sense of both presence and non-presence in the same moment. The effect of this moment is again to disturb the temporal logic of the scene, foregrounding the notion of a 'haunted' space and Derrida's concept of the ghost of past injustices. The repeated association between mortality and the

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[216] In an interview with Erin Torneo, Ghobadi explains that 'in this region it is very common that a lot of these children are orphans, having lost one or both parents to the wars or to landmines, it has been going on for so long, and it is so common, that in a way, it has become a cultural identity, or a rite of passage of its own…These children are the remnants of war, of conflict, often left parentless and without a choice, but to survive. And so there is no childhood.' 'The Things We Carry: Crossing Borders with '*A Time For Drunken Horses*' director Bahman Ghobadi.'
http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Ghobadi_Bahman_001025.html [accessed 01/07/06]

figure of Agrin in *Turtles Can Fly* prefigures the character of Mamo in *Half Moon*, and as such the two (ghost) figures can be seen as doubles that together represent different aspects of the Kurds' repressed history. Agrin is much more than simply a symbolic figure in this film, however. As the narrative unfolds, the action goes back in time a couple of days to show us when Agrin and her brother Hengov arrived in the camp. We learn that they are from Halabja, that their parents were killed during the violence and that they planned to go to the border with the rest of the refugees. It emerges that the blind child Agrin and her brother have with them is not their brother, as the other children assume, but her son. The audience learns through a flashback sequence that Agrin was raped by soldiers during the Iraqi attack on Halabja, and during this attack she became pregnant with the child.

As Lury describes in her article, 'Children In An Open World: Mobility as Ontology in New Iranian and Turkish Cinema', the children in Ghobadi's films live in a world that does not have space or time to recognise 'childhood'.[217] Social anthropologist Jason Hart also discusses the significance of this absence of childhood space in his essay 'Displaced Children's Participation in Political Violence' with regards to children involved in combat. Describing a scene in Ghobadi's film where a group of boys take up arms and position themselves on the roof of their school in case of attack (much to the distress of their teacher), Hart writes, 'Amid these horrors, the children's efforts to arm themselves are hardly shocking. Indeed, given the dangers and deprivation, such action appears tragically reasonable: an expression of young people's determination to survive against considerable odds in a setting where adults have failed in their duty to protect.'[218] The absence of a childhood space (and of protective adults) described by Hart and Lury is also illustrated in this film both visually and sonically in a scene that takes place at a scrap yard where the refugee and local children find work moving old shells. As the scene begins the children charge loudly towards the disused metal containers, upturned tanks and empty shells (the detritus of war). While in another context this would be a space in which the children could explore and play, here they organise themselves

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[217] Lury, 'Children In An Open World', op. cit.
[218] Jason Hart, 'Displaced Children's Participation in Political Violence: Towards a Greater Understanding of Mobilisation' in Nigel Thomas (ed.), *Children, Politics and Communication: Participation at the Margins* (Bristol: The Polity Press, 2009), p. 69.

quickly and begin sorting the empty shells offloaded from the trucks into ordered piles. The suppression of the children's imaginative response is embodied acoustically in this scene by the dull and deadened sounds of the pieces of metal as they are thrown against each other, a sonic effect reminiscent of the deadened sound of Ayoub's axe as it cuts through the wood in *A Time for Drunken Horses* discussed earlier.

While the other children get to work, Hengov leads his sister and nephew into a safe corner and tells her, 'Watch your child.' The film cuts to a close up of Agrin's face as she looks numbly into space, her face expressing a 'non-emotion' that again is embodied by the diegetic sound that takes the place of her absent speech – signalling the 'impossibility' of her being able to make sense of the trauma that she has experienced. As Caruth writes, 'The traumatized…carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.'[219] Agrin's inability at this moment, to express verbally the horror she feels as the words 'your child' ring in her ears, layered with the very specific spatio-temporal and heavily gendered position she is in (Agrin is physically 'stuck' in the space-time of the war zone as a female child victim of rape), *is given voice through sound* as we hear the empty shells fly through the air like missiles falling from the grey clouds. In this way, our empathetic engagement with Agrin is *enabled* through sound as it provides us access to how she perceives her environment. Sharing not just what she hears, but importantly, *how she hears*, not only provides a sense of her subjective experience but also creates a sense of intimacy and closeness through our shared senses.

The cacophony going on around her fades as her child begins to wander around the makeshift corridors of piled-up shells and starts calling into their hollows, playfully at first experimenting with the echoing sound saying, 'ooo' and 'oyy', and then 'Daddy!' before pausing and listening to the shell for a moment as if waiting for someone to answer. He wanders around the space exploring it with his voice while the subjective camera (low down from the child's point of audition) leads through a narrow corridor formed between the piles of metal. Because he cannot see, he soon

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[219] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 5.

becomes disorientated in this strange space and begins to cry into one of the shells. 'Daddy', he says again as the sound of an Iraqi fighter jet flying overhead bleeds into his voice. Moving over towards his mother, he calls out 'Mummy', but Agrin sits silently, refusing to acknowledge this name out loud. Her silence is broken once more by the deadened sound of the shells flying through the air.

As Human Rights Lawyer Rhonda Copelon notes, pregnancy as a result of rape 'continues the initial torture in a most intimate and invasive form.'[220] Trauma theorist Dori Laub develops this sense of continuation further as she highlights the durative temporality of trauma in which the victim is 'trapped' in a repetitive pattern of remembering, as she contends:

> Trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect. The survivor…is not truly in touch with either the core of his traumatic reality or with the fatedness of its reenactments, and thereby remains entrapped in both.[221]

Similarly, Agrin's refusal to acknowledge the child as her son demonstrates that his very existence perpetuates the psychological violence of the rape, both in her conscious mind and in her embodied memory. This creates a fractured sense of temporality as the traumatic past continues to haunt the present through the figure of the child, who is himself 'evidence' of the attack on both Agrin and on Halabja while her constant desire to 'move on' – to leave the camp and the child behind – signifies her need to separate herself from the physical reminders of the attack. The figure of her child, therefore, has enormous historical significance as he symbolically brings together what Stuart Hall refers to elsewhere as 'the 'unspeakable' stories of subjectivity' with 'the narratives of the history of a culture.'[222]

It soon becomes apparent that Agrin's desire to break away from the maternal role that has been forced upon her is stronger than her desire to live. Later

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[220] Rhonda Copelon, cited by Robyn Carpenter, 'Surfacing Children: Limitations of Genocidal Rape Discourse', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 22.2 (May, 2000), p. 435.
[221] Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (London: Routledge: 1992), p. 69
[222] Stuart Hall, 'Minimal Selves', in Lisa Appignanesi (ed.), *The Real Me: Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity*, *ICA Documents 6* (London: ICA, 1987), p. 44.

in the film she pleads with her brother to let her leave the child behind for someone to find and look after. 'What will we tell people when he grows up? Shall we say we found him in the streets? What will we tell him when he grows up?' she demands of Hengov. As she asks repeatedly '*what will we say?'* her inability to put into words the horror of her experience becomes tangible. That trauma makes speech inadequate is also borne out by Holocaust survivor Charlotte Delbo, who argues that some experiences cannot be adequately represented through language. Memories of violence, she insists, are '*not known in words, but in the body.'*[223] As this scene progresses, Agrin tells her brother to put the child in between them so he might get some sleep, but he replies that she will not be able to sleep unless she learns to like the child. She answers, 'How many times do I have to tell you? *He's not my child.'* Hengov begs her not to speak like that and moves over the bed to be closer to the child and brushes his face against his open hand. The sight of touch, an embodied gesture of kindness and compassion – now alien to her relationship with her own estranged body – appears to be too much for Agrin as she winces with toothache. Hengov picks up a bottle of kerosene from the corner of the tent and gives it to his sister as a painkiller. She takes a sip and holds the liquid in her mouth. As Hengov puts the child between them and tries to comfort him, his sister moves away and spits out the kerosene. The physical pain she experiences through her toothache is the material manifestation of the psychological pain of trauma. With her mouth full of kerosene (a bitter tasting, poisonous liquid) in order for the numbing effect to work, she has to keep her mouth closed, meaning that she cannot speak even if she wanted to. Thus, by remaining silent, she is doubly numbed to the rawness of her pain.

As Hengov and the boy go back to sleep, Agrin walks out into the darkness and goes to the lake she had been to earlier that day with Satellite. Wading into the middle of the water, she pours the remainder of the kerosene over her head and lights her shawl with a match. As she stands in the water with the flames all around her, she hears the child's voice calling out to her. She sees him on the hillside and follows him back to the tent where she finds him sleeping (he has a rope tied around

[223]Charlotte Delbo, cited in Roberta Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self', *New Literary History*, 26.1 (Winter, 1995), p. 170.

his ankle, and it is unclear whether Agrin had really seen him by the lake or if she had imagined him being there). Soaking wet and shivering with cold, she tries to cuddle into him, but the child wriggles out of her arms.

The image of the flames against the water acts as a sense memory of the rape, which is represented through flashback. As this sequence begins, the camera shows Agrin's feet as she steps slowly forward towards the edge of the cliff, the only sound being the wind blowing around the hillside. This sound bleeds into the frenetic diegetic sound of the flashback sequence in which we hear a cacophony of whooping, artillery fire, and screaming almost drowned out by the sound of the army truck engines relentlessly grinding forward. It is night in the flashback; the truck's headlights flood strips of light onto the chaotic scene as torrential rain pours down creating pools of water in the dirt. Flames flicker all around the frame from the burnt out houses and vehicles reflected in the dark pools of muddy water. The image then cuts back to a shot of Agrin standing a few feet away from the edge of the cliff; again the sound of the wind whirls around her. The strange sense of stillness created here, as she pauses, looking down over the cliff, is interrupted again by the diegetic sound of the flashback, as we hear Agrin scream followed by a male voice shouting at her. A soldier chases her and slaps her before throwing her to the ground. She gets away but he catches up with her and drags her down into a large puddle – she tries to crawl away but several men drag her back. She claws the waterlogged mud in a vain attempt to escape, but she is surrounded. The men hold her down and rape her. At the moment of the rape, the film cuts to a shot of her arms helplessly flailing. The torrential rain drowns out the diegetic sounds, but we hear her try to catch a breath in aural close-up before being submerged again under the water.

As Maureen Turim has discussed, the flashback in film juxtaposes different temporalities and foregrounds formally the relationship between history and subjective memory. She explains, 'If flashbacks give us images of memory, the personal archives of the past, they also give us images of history, the shared and recorded past.'[224] Flashbacks in film, she argues, frequently merge the different ways of remembering the past, 'giving large-scale social and political history the subjective

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[224] Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.

mode of a single, fictional individual's remembered experience.'[225] While the circumstances around the rape relate to a much broader historical event (the rape itself is an act of war), Ghobadi foregrounds how this historical event violently affected the lives of ordinary civilians by focussing on Agrin's highly subjective and embodied experience formally through the use of sound and image. In this harrowing flashback sequence, the image track is slowed down at the moment of the rape to give a sense of subjective temporality, as time seems to slow down. Simultaneously, the ambient noise around Agrin and the soldiers at the time of the attack is muted so that the audio focus is on the sound of Agrin's breath, which, slightly amplified, emphases her subjectivity. The effect of this use of aural close-up is that it recreates formally what Roberta Culbertson refers to as the 'compression of the self in the experience of physical distress', an instinctive reaction that she suggests, functions as part of the 'reductionism of survival.'[226]

Culbertson argues that in the recollection of a traumatic event, sounds and images take on a heightened, almost surreal quality perceived not through the conscious mind (which has become 'anesthetized' by the body), but through the senses. Memories of these events, she argues, are characterized by fleeting images but also by 'the percussion of blows, sounds, and movements of the body – disconnected, cacophonous, the cells suffused with the active power of adrenalin, or coated with anesthetizing numbness of noradrenalin.'[227] Recent work on film and phenomenology has explored how the medium of film is particularly able to convey the embodied nature of experience. As Vivian Sobchack contends 'cinema …transposes, without completely transforming, those modes of being alive and consciously embodied in the world that count for each of us as direct experience.'[228] The foregrounding of embodied experience that Sobchack describes, and the way in which this might allow for an empathetic, and potentially also ethical, engagement with film, has particular significance in the rape narrative.

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[225] Ibid.

[226] Roberta Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self', op. cit., p. 178.

[227] Ibid., p. 174.

[228] Vivian Sobchack, 'Phenomenology and the Film Experience' in Linda Williams (ed.), *Viewing Positions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), p. 37.

In Sarah Projansky's *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture*, she argues that 'at least since the 1940s, war films have often used representations of women's rapes to tell stories about men.'[229] This tendency of the war film to negate the centrality of the female rape victim in these narratives is paralleled by the way discussions of rape as an act of war have historically also been marginalised in dominant historiographies. As Copelon notes, 'Most of the time rape has been invisible, or has come to light as part of the competing diplomacies of war, illustrating the viciousness of the conqueror or the innocence of the conquered…Military histories rarely refer to rape, and military tribunals rarely either charge or sanction it.'[230] According to Shahrzad Mojab, this has also been the case with the Iran-Iraq conflict; as she notes in her essay, 'Vengeance and Violence: Kurdish Women Recount the War', while rarely discussed in either official or unofficial circles, during the Anfal campaign thousands of Kurdish women were abducted and raped by the Iraqi army. According to Mojab, many of those who returned after the fall of Saddam Hussein were subsequently killed by family members because of the shame they felt the women had brought to the family.[231]

Crucially, while cultural discourses of damaged 'honour' seem to absent or negate the woman's body and her own feelings about the rape, the film's phenomenological use of sound heightens our sense of Agrin's embodiment, as well as her subjectivity. In doing so, it repositions the body of the rape victim at the very centre of the war narrative. In the rape scene itself, as Agrin becomes partially submerged in water and is surrounded by disorientating noises, the use of point-of-audition allows the audio-viewer to *share* her perspective rather than presenting her as 'other' through objective framing, both visually and aurally. As Stan Link describes in relation to the landing scene in *Saving Private Ryan* (that similarly stresses

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[229] Sarah Projansky, *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), p. 120.

[230] Rhonda Copelon, 'Surfacing Gender: Re-Engraving Crimes Against Women in Humanitarian Law', *Hastings Women's Law Journal*, 5 (1994), p. 243.

[231] See Shahrzad Mojab, 'Vengeance and Violence: Kurdish Women Recount the War', *Canadian Women Studies*, 19.14, 2000). See also Shahrzad Mojab, 'No Safe Haven: Violence against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan' in Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (eds.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 108 – 132; Moha Ennaji and Fatima Sadiqi (eds.), *Gender and Violence in the Middle East* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); and Elizabeth D. Heineman (ed.), *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones: From the Ancient World to the Era of Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

embodiment through its use of sound), 'its acts of seeing and hearing don't belong simply to an omniscient and disembodied camera and microphone. Instead…[it]… references physical embodiment and all its limitations of perspective and scope – eyes and ears rather than lenses and tape recorders.'[232] By representing rape as an act of war therefore, and importantly of a character who is central rather than peripheral to the narrative, I would argue that *Turtles Can Fly* goes some way to making visible and audible the stories of these women and girls whose voices are so often absent in historical accounts of conflict.

Conclusion

Culbertson argues that after experiencing a traumatic event (or series of events) the survivor must tell what happened in order to re-establish 'their place in the world.' While the memories of the trauma may be held deeply in the body, the act of narration distances the horror of experience from the body without diminishing or dismissing its presence: 'Telling…is a process of disembodying memory.'[233] But if, as historians Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone assert, testimony is 'the passing on of knowledge that might otherwise disappear', this is a process that cannot take place in isolation – there must be someone present to listen and pass on those memories.[234] In concurrence, Laub stresses the embodied nature of speaking and listening as she notes that bearing witness must take place in the 'intimate and total presence of another – in the position of one who hears.'[235] Through the narrativisation of the experiences of refugees, orphans and victims of rape therefore, I argue that Ghobadi's films transform embodied memories, releasing them from their fixed position in the past, creating a space for them in the discourse of the present and in so doing, offer a radical alternative to dominant historiography.

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[232] Stan Link, 'Nor the Eye Filled with Seeing', op. cit., pp. 76 – 90.

[233] Roberta Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self', op. cit., p. 179.

[234] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 'Introduction', p. 10.

[235] Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, op. cit., p. 72.

In this chapter, I have suggested ways in which the material qualities of sound make it a particularly evocative for thinking about the evanescence of minority histories and, in particular, how the durative properties of sound – its 'belatedness', also has powerful resonance in relation to the 'belatedness' of trauma and traumatic memory. I have also argued that Ghobadi's films' highly subjective use of sound encourages an intersubjective, empathetic and therefore ethical spectatorship that positions the audio-viewer as a witness to the films' testimonies of war. While this chapter has considered the relationship between sound and subjectivity, in Chapter Three I move the focus outwards to discuss how the use of sound in films can convey a sense of the lived experience of the acoustic environment within which the subject is positioned. This experience of sound in lived space can be transposed into a cinematic 'soundscape', which can articulate the changing power dynamics over the period of time in which the film is set, convey the changing mood of an era, and articulate the passing of time.

Chapter 3

The Sounds of Memory and History in the films of Jia Zhangke

> Filmmaking is a way of remembering. Yet our film screen is almost all filled up with official discourse. People often ignore ordinary life. They belittle everyday existence. They like to play with legends of history…But I want to speak about the feelings buried deep in time, those personal experiences teeming in unnameable and undirected impulses.
>
> – Jia Zhangke[236]

A shrill, sustained note pierces the darkness of the black screen of the opening credits of Jia Zhangke's *Platform* (*Zhantai*, 2000). A moment later, the melodious sounds of traditional Chinese instruments can be heard as the musicians in the performance troupe about to play begin to tune up: first, the lute-like strings of the sanxian, joined then by the fiddle sound of the erhu and then, a bamboo flute – the lilting, bird-like dizi. These sounds interweave with the ambient expectant hum of the auditorium and the voices of a group of peasants talking and laughing nearby, as they wait before taking their seats. As the musicians warm up their instruments, playing different variations of arpeggios and glissandi, the formal properties of the exercises, which are by their nature repetitive, create a sense of stilted movement. The ascending notes seem to embody a sense of forward projection that is drawn back as the notes descend, encapsulating aesthetically a sense of temporal suspension. These first three minutes of screen time capture the mood of expectation that pervades the entire film, and Jia Zhangke's entire body of work thus far, through sound.

Platform, Jia's second full-length feature film, follows the lives of the members of the Fenyang Cultural Group: a state-run Maoist propaganda troupe that perform plays and music around remote areas of Northern China. The film chronicles their journey from the early days of the reform-era in 1979 to the end of the 1980s, when the group have been transformed through privatisation into the 'All Star Rock n' Breakdance Electronic Band.' Documenting this period of rapid societal change

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[236] *Jia thinks 1996-2008: Jia Zhangke film journal* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2009) cited in Jiwei Xiao, 'The Quest for Memory: Documentary and Fiction in Jia Zhangke's Films', *Senses of Cinema*, 59 (23 June 2011). http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/the-quest-for-memory-documentary-and-fiction-in-jia-zhangke%E2%80%99s-films/ [accessed 26.06.11].

(chronologically, the period leading up to Jia's earlier film, *Xiao Wu* (1997)), the film presents a sense of memory and history through the transforming soundscape of the era: from revolutionary songs of the early post-Mao period, to illegal Taiwanese gangtai, to the sounds of Bollywood emanating from the local cinema, to the nihilistic electronic rock music of the reform-era, and finally to the 'easy listening' sounds of 'Travelling in Suzhou' ('*Gusu xing*') that sonically encode the domesticity of the film's closing scene.

While the Ghobadi films I discussed in the previous chapter have grown out of a culture in which visual (and aural) evidence of Kurdish history is marked by its absence, Jia's films, by contrast, emerge from a public space saturated by official documentation that provides historical evidence of the People's Republic of China.[237] Importantly, while Kurdish minority voices are absent in the dominant historiographies of the Middle East, minority voices in the People's Republic have historically been legitimised through the discursive act of 'speaking bitterness' (*suku*), which subsumes personal narratives of remembrance within the social and political realm of collective memory.[238] As Gail Hershatter describes in her essay 'The Subaltern Talks Back: Reflections on Subaltern Theory and Chinese History', during the period from 1949 to the early 1980s, the commitment of China's official historiography to defending and giving voice to subaltern interests resulted in a 'minority' voice that spoke with the accent of the State. She writes:

> After 1949, teams of historians worked assiduously all over China to collect and publish oral histories of worker and peasant resistance to feudal and imperialist authorities. They called forth enormous amounts of material – songs, stories of strikes and riots, accounts of daily life during and between moments of struggle – that otherwise never would have been textually 'spoken'. When subalterns (typically workers and peasants) speak in post-1949 China, they do so in a vocabulary provided by the state in the process of revolution. [239]

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[237] This is made evident in the films themselves through the visual proliferation of identity cards, photographs, political posters, mobilising banners, framed testimonials, television news and archival film footage which all bear traces of China's official past.

[238] See Rubie S. Watson, 'Making Secret Histories' in Rubie S. Watson (ed.), *Memory, History, and Opposition under State Socialism* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), p. 83.

[239] Gail Hershatter, 'The Subaltern Talks Back: Reflections on Subaltern Theory and Chinese History', *positions*, 1 (December, 1993), p. 107.

As I suggested in Chapter One, the process of creating 'approved' histories within the public sphere is as much one of forgetting as of remembering – and this played a crucial role in the Cultural Revolution. In April 1958, Mao Zedong spoke of the revolutionary potential of what he considered the 'poor and blank' quality of the Chinese people:

> China's 600 million people have two remarkable peculiarities; they are, first of all, poor, and secondly, blank. That may seem like a bad thing, but it is really a good thing. Poor people want change, want to do things, want revolution. A clean sheet of paper has no blotches, and so the newest and most beautiful words can be written on it, the newest and most beautiful pictures can be painted on it.[240]

According to Maurice Meisner, this desire to erase the past and start again revealed that – unlike Marxism, which recognised the 'accomplishments of the past' and saw socialism and communism as part of 'the progressive movement of history itself' – Maoists wanted to see the present as 'unburdened by the historical weight of the past.'[241] This sense of being 'unburdened' by the past has profound resonance with Walter Benjamin's 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in which he offers an impassioned plea against the recklessness of such 'future orientated' ideologies: 'For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably'.[242] For Benjamin, as for Derrida later, the creation of a historical consciousness alert to the co-existence of the past in the present (the presence of ghosts) is vital in the creation of a just future.

As Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang describe in their introduction to *Re-visioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in*

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[240] Mao cited by Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1986), p. 213**.**

[241] Ibid. p. 215. As part of this ideological project of creating a brand new culture, in the early days of the People's Republic, the state instigated a policy of re-education in order to instil 'correct consciousness' amongst its people, insisting on total severance with the influences of the past. These aims were achieved in part through the introduction of 'thought reform' (*ssu-hsiang kai-tsao*) in the autumn of 1951 – a policy, Meisner argues, that has remained a key method of 'social, political and ideological control' in post-Mao China, (see ibid. p. 95). This level of state control, which actively suppressed dissenting voices, continued throughout the Cultural Revolution, into the reform-era and beyond, despite certain freedoms resulting from Deng Xiaoping's 'Open Door Policy' and has had an obvious impact on Chinese film culture.

[242] Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 247.

Reform China, since the reform-era, popular memories have gained particular currency and momentum in the PRC as people have tried to find 'moral and cognitive frameworks to understand, assess, and sometimes resist [the] momentous changes in their lives'.[243] In this context, they argue, through 'television series, documentaries, novels, songs, theatres, music, and memorabilia in street markets, the purveyors of public and commercial nostalgia for China's revolutionary past have produced a 'memory industry'.[244] While the films of the Fifth Generation produced a very particular 'version' of the past through their use of epic narratives – often demonstrating a similarly nostalgic attitude towards the past (in ways not dissimilar to Thailand's heritage films that I shall refer to in Chapter Four), by contrast, Jia Zhangke is concerned with producing films that reflect the 'ordinariness' and heterogeneity of 'everyday memory'.

As Jiwei Xiao notes in her essay, 'The Quest for Memory: Documentary and Fiction in Jia Zhangke's Films' while Jia's recent films have been more explicitly concerned with memory – particularly the documentary *I Wish I Knew* (*Hai shang chuanqi*, 2010), the hybrid docu-drama *24 City* (*Er shi si cheng ji*, 2008) and the short film *Our Ten Years* (*Women de shinian*, 2007) – his body of work as a whole can be understood as suggesting ways in which the cinema might 'function as memory' and 'partake in historical experience.'[245] While, as Jiwei notes, Jia's films are situated in the diegetic present and do not use cinematic techniques that we have come to associate with the 'memory film' (such as flashback, reflexive voice-over, and elliptical editing), the mise-en-scène is nonetheless saturated in period detail such as 'pop songs, fashion, everyday bric-a-brac' and even 'less tangible ones such as voices, gestures, demeanors and manners'.[246] In this chapter, I will focus on how film sound can also convey a sense of this ordinary 'everydayness' of memory and how

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[243] Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang (eds.), *Re-visioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007), p. 1.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Jiwei Xiao, 'The Quest for Memory: Documentary and Fiction in Jia Zhangke's Films', op. cit.

[246] Ibid. As Jiwei notes, in this way Jia's films can be grouped with a small number of important recent films that deal with memories of the Cultural Revolution including Wang Xiaoshuai's *Shanghai Dreams* (*Qinghong*, 2005) and Gu Changwei's *Peacock* (*Kongque*, 2005), and documentaries, Wang Bing's *A Chinese Memoir* (*He Fengming,* 2007) and Hu Jie's *Though I am Gone* (*Wo sui si qu*, 2006) and *Looking for Lin Zhao's Soul* (*Xunzhao Lin Zhao de linghun*, 2004).

this might also produce a sense of historical consciousness, by thinking about how sound shapes lived space (and in particular the relationship between acoustic space and power) and how this experience of lived space is mediated and transposed in film texts.

As I discussed in Chapter One, in film, sound design can evoke a sense of the dialectic between the public and the private, by establishing both the atmosphere of an era within the diegetic space of the film, and by setting the (sometimes conflicting) emotional tone for each scene. Thus, in films about the past this use of sound can articulate the ways in which social and personal memories are connected. Throughout Jia's work, long gaps in the films' often laconic dialogue are frequently interrupted by extraneous sounds and voices flowing into the diegetic acoustic space from overhead loud speaker systems, nearby television sets and radio broadcasts. These mediated, official interjections contextualise the narrative in relation to political, social, and economic developments both on a national and a local level, providing an overarching historical framework against which we can position the films' narrative trajectory. For example, in Jia's films it is through television broadcasts that we witness the news of Beijing's successful 2008 Olympic bid and hear of the diplomatic row between China and the United States that ensued from the 2001 Hainan incident. It is through crackling overhead speakers that we hear about the 1997 reunification of Hong Kong to the mainland and the 'rehabilitation' of Liu Shaoqi by Deng Xiaoping in 1980, along with the Party's declaration of its commitment to 'return to the bases of Mao Zedong Thought'. On a local level, it is through the soundtrack that we hear about the development of the Datong-Beijing expressway; the crackdown of petty crime in Fenyang; and the names of recently convicted criminals facing the death penalty.

In these films, the complex diegetic soundscapes, which are often recorded using the documentary method of 'direct sound', are represented as 'occupied' spaces, articulating the dense layering of competing discourses in reform-era China and evoking acoustically the struggle of the subject to negotiate a space within them. Where the previous chapter focussed on sound's ability to express a sense of a character's interiority, this chapter draws outwards to explore how film sound can

articulate the shifting dynamics of social space over a period of time and express what Richard Dyer has called elsewhere the 'texture of memory'.[247]

The Sounds of Socialism

The sense of expectation established on the soundtrack in the first few moments of *Platform* is violently ruptured as the house bell rings out over the acoustic space of the auditorium, calling to attention the start of the performance. One of the members of the performance troupe, Yin Ruijuan, walks onto the stage (dressed in a traditional Maoist jacket and cap), and introduces the play: 'Train to Shaoshan' ('*Huoche xiangzhe Shaoshan pao*'). The audience applaud enthusiastically, in recognition of Shaoshan's significance as the hometown of Mao Zedong. Ruijuan continues: 'A southbound train races across the sunny land; it is heading for Shaoshan, Chairman Mao's hometown. Look here they come!' According to Elizabeth J. Perry, during the revolutionary period theatre played a crucial role in 'eliciting an emotional reaction that was used intentionally to solidify popular commitment'.[248] While discussions of the Cultural Revolution have tended to focus on the role of ideology, organisation and social structure, the mass mobilisation of emotions through staged theatrical performances, as well as performative 'struggle sessions', was critical to the campaign's initial success, and to its sustained level of support. Perry writes that 'such techniques drew creatively upon dominant themes in Chinese political discourse that emphasise group – more than individual – bases of morality' and that building 'a sense of collective solidarity…was a fundamental element of revolutionary mobilization.'[249]

Significantly, then, in this scene in *Platform*, the point of audition during the mise-en-abyme is from within the space of the diegetic audience itself, as the camera films the performance in extreme long shot from the back of the auditorium.

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[247] Here Dyer is referring specifically to the way music in film can create a sense of 'how it feels' to remember through affect. See Richard Dyer, *Nino Rota: Music, Film and Feeling* (London: BFI & Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 163.
[248] Elizabeth J. Perry, 'Moving the Masses: Emotion Work in the Chinese Revolution', *Mobilization: An International Journal*, 7.2 (2002), p. 112.
[249] ibid.

The slight reverb of the speaker's amplified voice as it is projected from the stage resonates around the space and seems to merge with the subdued ambient sounds coming from the stalls: the coughs, chatter and laughter of the audience. This effect is further underscored as the mellifluous rhythm of Ruijuan's words and warm tonal quality of her voice seem to be *absorbed* by the porosity of the spaces between these embodied sounds and into the ambience of the general room tone. This aural confluence creates an impression of wholeness – an emotional quality that captures the ideal essence of collectivism. Along with the mobilising lyrics of the song, which project a sense of dynamism through the evocation of travel, this scene demonstrates the extent to which Maoism continued to be a cultural force, particularly in rural areas, even after the death of Mao Zedong, while highlighting the importance of the role played by the emotions in mobilising the masses during the revolutionary period.

As the play begins, the troupe's flautist plays a soaring, joyful melody while a group of actors (bent down over wooden chairs pretending to be the wheels of the train) enter from stage right singing in harmony with the flute: '*Wheels flying, whistles blowing, train heading for Shaoshan, over mountains across rivers toward the radiant sun*.' A ripple of laughter flows across the audience in response to this comical sight. Then one of the characters on stage asks how much longer the journey will take, as he says that one of the older passengers is finding it too slow. Somewhat affronted by this, the old man in question steps up and says in response, 'Young folk, don't you know?' before bursting into song: '*Learn from Dazhai Commune, where poor farmers raised the red flag. They united in action – fearless and practical they acted as one.*' The last line of the song is emphasised as the group repeats it, raising their arms in unison.

The dynamism evoked by the lyrics and performance style is also made concrete through the motif of the train which, first introduced here, becomes a pivotal, structuring motif in the film. On a metaphorical level, the verbal exchange described above betrays an anxiety over the tantalisingly slow pace of change as experienced by young people in peripheral communities during this period. However, the theme of train travel also resonates more broadly within the film as a powerful indicator of the changing perceptions of space and time during this decade

of rapid industrialisation, as well as the changing horizons of personal expectation that followed.

According to Arnold Trachtenberg, during the process of industrialisation in the West the railway introduced 'a new system of behaviour: not only of travel and communication but of thought, of feeling, of expectation…the Utopian promise implicit in the establishment of speed as a new principle of public life.'[250] While in China at the end of the 1970s this utopian promise was almost tangible in the country's economic centres, in places like Fenyang being as it was on the cusp of such great change (but always just out of reach), it manifested itself in a sense of suspension. This mood is articulated in the scene that takes place shortly after the performance where the troupe's leader, Lao Xu, berates Cui Mingliang (the film's central character) for keeping them waiting, saying that he lacks 'discipline' and does not understand the principles of collectivism. Interestingly, he focuses his annoyance on Mingliang's impression of the train during the performance:

Mingliang: 'Give me a break I'm not that late. I didn't spoil the show.'
Lao Xu: 'Didn't you? What the hell were those train sounds?'
Mingliang: 'I don't know how a train sounds!'
Lao Xu: 'Never taken a train? Even if you've never tasted pork you must have seen a pig!'
Mingliang: 'I've only heard one!'
[Everyone laughs].
Lao Xu: 'Seen *The Train Driver's Son*? Seen *Railway Guerillas*?'
Mingliang: 'I'm not a train driver's son.'

As their hometown Fenyang is not on a railway line, it is likely that none of these characters would have ever heard a train and so their only reference points against which to measure their performance are fictional. Driving into the darkness, the group playfully mimic the sound of a train's whistle, producing an antiphonal response to the sustained note heard at the very beginning of the film. We then hear the group vocalise the chugging sounds of the train's engine and the steady rhythm of the wheels on the tracks, which bring a close to the film's prologue.

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[250] Arnold Trachtenberg in Foreword to Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Leamington Spa, Hamburg and New York: Berg, 1986), p. xiii.

The title of the film refers to the platform of a train station (an image that connotes both movement and stillness), but also comes from a pop song of the late 1980s by Liu Hong. This song appears later in the film in a scene in which the performance troupe's truck gets stuck in wet sands in a remote area of northern China while they are on tour. Realising that they may be there for some time, Mingliang puts a tape of the song on the truck's cassette player. As the other members of the troupe gather round to listen, the absence of dialogue focuses our attention on the song's lyrics, which seem to speak of the characters' own subjective experience of suspended time. In the song, a character waits for a train that seems like it will never arrive: '*The long and empty platform / The wait seems never ending / The long box cars are carrying my short-lived love / The long and empty platform / Lonely, we can only wait / All my love is out-bound / Nothing on the in-bound train*.' As well as signalling a particular time period, the wistful lyrics and melancholy music (a guitar-based soft rock sound often associated with Westernised pop music of the 1980s) convey the frustration of unfulfilled expectation that characterised the experience of modernity in those communities peripheral to the dynamic centres of change in this period in China's recent past, as information about the radical social and economic developments being experienced in China's coastal cities (such as Shanghai, Guangzhou and Wenzhou) gradually filtered through, although still remained to be felt in any tangible way in their lived reality.[251]

In its ability to bring back a particular feeling or emotion from a past moment, music, of any genre, is extremely powerful and because of this it is often used as kind of 'shorthand' in film texts that deal with memory or the past to provide depth or 'texture' to the representation of a character's experiences and sense of self. As Philip Drake notes, in film 'the use of period songs re-key narrative events, evoking an associational structure of feeling of the period.'[252] Whether through its tonal quality or through personal association, music can 'take us back' to a time in the past, bearing traces of that past just as a photograph might. This connection also

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[251] The association of music in films with the idea of 'utopian promise' has been the subject of much thought-provoking scholarship – particularly in the work of Richard Dyer – and it is interesting to make the connection between the utopian promise of modernity described by Arnold Trachtenberg with this work on film music.

[252] Philip Drake, ''Mortgaged to Music': New Retro Movies in 1990s Hollywood Cinema' in Paul Grainge (ed.), *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 193.

suggests ways in which memory is perhaps always cultural. As several memory theorists have noted, the process of remembering always involves an assemblage of sounds and images that do not come from within us but from the world through which we move. [253] Thus, as Dyer notes, 'histories and memories are shot through with shards of matter from the past, and not least music; and if film cannot actually be the past or a memory, it can explore historiography and remembering.'[254]

Out of the monochromic barren landscape, one of the group catches the sound of a distant freight train making its way closer towards them. Whooping and screaming with ecstatic delight, they run as fast as they can to get close to it before it passes by. On the soundtrack, the volume of the diegetic pop song is heightened as it continues over the sound of the train blowing its whistle and rumbling loudly over the tracks – announcing its presence before coming into view. This aural juxtaposition emphasises both the symbolic weight of the motif in the film and in the characters' lives at this pivotal moment in China's recent past. As Jason McGrath observes, as well as being 'a literal industrial emblem of modernisation' the train is also an 'abstract symbol of modernity actually experienced largely as an absence and a longing.'[255] This sense of longing is tangible as we see the troupe filmed in extreme long shot climb the hillside and run up onto the railway bridge, calling out the train sounds they had performed earlier in the film's opening scene as the train itself speeds out of view.

During the course of the film, the sense of wonder demonstrated in the scene on the bridge turns into one of silent resignation as the 'utopian' promise of the earlier moment never materialises. While in the scene described above the sound of the train's whistle symbolises new (albeit unattainable) opportunities for travel and experience, by the film's final scene it has become an emblem of thwarted ambition. Framed within a small interior domestic space, Mingliang dozes on the sofa while Ruijuan, now his wife, entertains their young child as a kettle boils on the hob. The soporific atmosphere created by Mingliang's faint snore and the traditional

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[253] See for example Andrew Hoskins, 'New Memory: Mediating History', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21.4 (2001) pp. 333 – 346.

[254] Richard Dyer, *Nino Rota: Music, Film and Feeling*, op. cit., p. 163.

[255] Jason McGrath, 'The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: from Postsocialism to a Transnational Aesthetic' in Zhang Zhen (ed.), *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 98.

sounds of 'Travelling in Suzhou' ('*Gusu xing*') playing in the background is shattered by the blast of the kettle's whistle into the acoustic space. This sound, a homophone of the piercing note that began the film, now brings it to a close. This symbolic use of antiphony suggests that in the space of the ten years that have passed between then and now, despite the official rhetoric of progress and transformation, nothing in their lived reality has really changed.

The rhetoric of synchronicity encapsulated in the train motif in *Platform* forms a dialectic in the film with the discourse of productivity and industry associated with revolutionary mobilisation. Both discursive frameworks privilege the regulation and productive use of time and a sense of forward trajectory (literally and ideologically). This is a connection that is articulated in the film through the use of sound at the point where the prologue ends and the main body of the film begins, as the improvised sound of the train cuts abruptly on the soundtrack to the fast, regimented rhythm of a sewing machine. A woman dressed in Maoist clothing is bent over the machine steadily operating its foot pedal, moving her body slightly in synchrony with its beat as she listens to revolutionary music on the radio – the 1948 propaganda song 'We Workers Have Power' ('*Za men gong ren you li liang*'). The music has a similarly upbeat rhythm and a 'rallying' energy (resulting from the different voices singing together in harmony) that interweaves with the rhythm of the machine, thereby also forming a connection with the movement of the woman's body.

In his article 'Music and the Politics of Sound: Nationalism, Citizenship, and Auditory Space', George Revill contends that the 'physical properties of sound, pitch, rhythm, timbre seem to act on and through the body in ways which require neither explanation nor reflection.'[256] For Revill this means that music has a particular ability to 'play on the emotions' in order to 'arouse and subdue, animate and pacify' – an ability exploited by nationalist music, he suggests, as it 'draws cultural authority from the apparently shared intersubjective qualities of sound.'[257] Nationalist music, he contends, draws together social and political messages and incorporates them

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[256] George Revill, 'Music and the Politics of Sound: Nationalism, Citizenship, and Auditory Space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 18 (2000), p. 602.
[257] Ibid.

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into 'an aesthetic of bodily involvement' encouraging participation through 'its rhythmic and melodic qualities.'[258] The mention Revill makes here of bodily movement seems to have particular significance in relation to this scene in *Platform* while also resonating with Perry's discussion of the role of 'emotion work' in 'mobilising the masses'. Both of these arguments are at work in this scene in *Platform*, as the 'intersubjective qualities' of 'We Workers Have Power' (in particular, its timbre and harmony) demonstrate this ability of music to 'harness' the emotions and produce 'participatory' subjects. Moreover, the synergic relationship between the mobilising force of this music and the repetitive rhythm of machine noise in this scene suggests that the body's rhythms can similarly be 'harnessed' by those of industry, thereby creating a regulated 'productive body' for the 'participatory subject' characteristic of the socialist era.

Yet, it soon becomes clear that times are changing in Fenyang, as Mingliang, who is the woman's son, pesters her to finish the bell-bottom trousers that she has been sewing for him. Despite the presence of this iconic image of Western seventies' fashion, the mise-en-scène of the room and his mother's dress place the scene within a space-time that still feels rooted in the revolutionary era. This scene deliberately contrasts the attitudes of the mother and her son in the framing of the two figures: the mother bent over the sewing machine embodying productivity and industry, while the son stands leaning against the doorframe drinking tea. The space between the mother and son in the first part of the scene is divided into two halves by the dark line of the doorframe, suggesting that these two characters come from two ideologically opposing positions. The woman's strong work ethic (mirrored in the second part of the scene by Mingliang's father) is also made evident in the dialogue between her and her son, in which she criticises her son for not making himself 'useful' (significantly, the sound of the machine only stops momentarily when she breaks off from work to say this). When Mingliang jokes in response that he is an 'art worker' who uses his brain, she answers incredulously: 'Really? Here you follow orders.'

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[258] Ibid.

This sense of order (both temporal and spatial) is evoked through the layering of sound in this scene. Like the metronomic ticking of a clock, the regular staccato beat of the sewing machine seems to impress a structure onto the sound, producing a similar sense of the regimented linearity of clock time. This is further underscored in the second part of the scene when Mingliang's father comes in from outside with an armful of firewood. As he enters the room and interrupts his son's relaxed talk with his friends (about fashion), the regular chugging rhythm of the tractor's engine heard through the open doorway dominates the interior acoustic space. Interestingly, this diegetic sound replicates the sound of the sewing machine and again seems synchronised with the propagandist music on the radio. This circularity imbues the scene with a unifying sense of order and productivity that, like the performance at the beginning of the film, evokes the ideology of collectivism. Although the mood of the conversation for the majority of the scene is jocular, the insistent, regimented beat of the machines undercuts this feeling, creating an atmosphere of intense pressure that articulates the intergenerational tensions between Mingliang and his parents. Despite the elements of humour in the dialogue, this tension pervades the scene, coming to a head in the conversation that takes place between Mingliang and his father (about the 'uselessness' of his 'bourgeois' trousers), just as the rousing music on the radio reaches a crescendo. As the father accuses his son of sounding like a 'capitalist roader' when he speaks of being an 'art worker', their dialogue highlights the tensions between the competing ideologies of communism and individualism that began to circulate in the early days of the reform-era – a pivotal socio-cultural shift that Jia's films here articulates through sound.

'A New Mode of Listening'

Describing the soundscape of the PRC between 1949 and 1979 in *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender and Politics, 1978-1997*, Nimrod Baranovitch argues that the state's monolithic structure, which

'imposed unity in almost every domain', resulted in there being only one audible voice within the public sphere, that of the Communist Party.[259] Reaching a crescendo in the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the party's message, he writes, 'was disseminated, through every possible medium – film, radio, recordings, television, live performances, and public address systems – and [was] heard and seen 'everywhere' and 'at all times.''[260] Following the 'opening up' of the reform-era, however, the soundscape of the PRC also began to change.[261] The introduction of new, (comparatively) inexpensive tape recorders and cassettes, Baranovitch argues, had a 'decentralizing and democratizing effect' as for the first time since the establishment of the People's Republic, people could choose what they wanted to listen to.[262] As more people started to own tape recorders, he explains, a 'new mode of listening' began to be experienced as the reception of music no longer needed to be restricted to public spaces where the sounds heard were dependent on the choices made by the state, but now 'individuals could create [their own] intimate sonic space'.[263]

Just as rail travel evokes the changing conceptualisations of time and space in Jia's films, the presence of diegetic pop music also signifies fundamental shifts that occurred at this time in the perception of space-time and the limits of experience. In one scene in *Platform*, for example, Mingliang and his friends listen to illegal gangtai music from Taiwan (Teresa Tang) on a transistor radio. The thin, compressed sonic quality of the pop music (played quietly so as not to draw unwanted attention to it) makes the sound feel far removed from the point of audition – Zhang Jun's cramped bedroom in Fenyang. This sense of distance is symbolic of their own rather abstract appreciation of geographical distance as suggested by their conversation, which

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[259] Nimrod Baranovitch, *China's New Voices: Popular Music, Ethnicity, Gender and Politics, 1978-1997.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), p. 1.
[260] Ibid., p. 3.
[261] As Baranovitch writes: 'One of the immediate consequences of the opening of China to the outside world, a reform that was labelled the 'open door policy', was the flooding into the country of foreign cultural products, among which was popular music. As foreigners could move into and out of China more freely, cassettes and records of contemporary pop started to be smuggled in and soon swept the entire mainland. The earliest foreign popular music to penetrate China came from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This music has been labelled gangtai music.' Ibid. p. 10.
[262] Ibid., pp. 12 – 3.
[263] Ibid.

indicates that distance does not mean a great deal if you are never able to go anywhere:

> *Jun*: Where is Ulan Bator?
> *Eryong*: Capital of Outer Mongolia.
> *Jun*: Where's Outer Mongolia?
> *Eryong*: Up north, past Inner Mongolia.
> *Jun*: And further North?
> *Eryong*: USSR
> *Jun*: Any further north?
> *Eryong*: The sea I guess
> *Jun*: And further north?
> *Mingliang*: What the fuck are you on about? Further north is here, Fenyang.
> 18, Wujia Lane…Zhang Jun's house.

Significantly, later in the film, when Jun has finally managed to go travelling, he returns from a visit to Guangzhou (an economic centre in the south) bringing with him the 'new sounds' of the city: pop music from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Carrying a ghetto blaster, he walks along the path towards the troupe's rehearsal space – the centre of the sound *moving with him* as opposed to *surrounding him* – an important shift that indicates that wider socio-cultural and political changes are happening.[264]

When the rest of the troupe rushes out to see him, they are all excited to hear about life in the south and hear the new sounds he has brought back with him. The image track then cuts to an interior 'disco' scene where they are dancing to the song, their energetic and expressive dance moves foregrounding a sense of autonomy that vividly contrasts with the regimented 'machine-like' movement of Mingliang's mother at the sewing machine earlier. This diegetic sound then bleeds into the next scene, which takes place the following day as Zhang Di is still being played on Jun's ghetto blaster, providing accompaniment as they do their chores. Importantly, in bringing the sound with them, they are able to create their own autonomous acoustic world. This 'new world' also reaches out into the wider world with the promise of travel and adventure, as indicated on the diegetic soundtrack by

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[264] The music he is listening to is 'Genghis Khan' ('*Cheng ji si han*') – a poppy rock 'n' roll number with twangy guitars and a stomping bass line by Zhang Di, who the lyrics tell us is '*always asked if Taiwan girls are better than Singapore girls*.' Highlighting the connection made earlier between sound and travel in the scene in Jun's bedroom, Mingliang walks towards him pointing a gun and joking: 'Stop! Foreign Devil!'

the overlaying of this song with a 'Teach-Yourself-English' tape playing loudly in the aural mix. In contrast to the compressed, distant, almost 'other-worldly' quality of the gangtai music heard earlier, this combination of sounds, listened to at relatively high volume, seems to fill the acoustic space, thus seeming to bring this 'other world' closer to home.

From 1978 onwards, with the impact of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, China experienced 'a radical break' with its revolutionary past, which led to a questioning of the framework of experiences, values and ideologies associated with that past. As Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang describe:

> Market, consumption, and media, all conceived in global rather than merely national terms, have replaced revolutionary mobilization as the dynamizing force of social change, announcing the triumph of the ideology of consumerism, but also opening the way for the liberation of peoples and localities by a plurality of worldviews, for the assertion of difference, and for the revision of the past and the creation of the future. Dizzying change and bewildering fragmentation not only undermine inherited narratives but call into question the very possibility of encapsulation within a coherent narrative of the past, present, and the future.[265]

Recalling the experience of modernity in early twentieth century in the West described in Marshall Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, the sense of temporal fragmentation described by Dirlik and Zhang is expressed formally at several points in Jia's earlier film, the eponymously titled, *Xiao Wu*, through the use of asynchronous sound and image.[266]

In the opening scene, for example, *Xiao Wu* begins with the sound of a recorded performance of a comic skit (*xiaopin*) set against the black screen of the opening credits. A clipped, fast-paced, staccato exchange between a man and a woman speaking in local Shanxi dialect is intercut with the sound of an audience's laughter and applause which ripples warmly across the non-diegetic soundtrack. This sound then merges with the diegetic sound of the distant rumble of a truck coming closer as it makes its way along the dusty country road. Juxtaposed against these

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[265] Arif Dirlik and Xudong Zhang, *Postmodernism and China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 8.
[266] See Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983).

sounds, the image shows a family standing by the roadside as they wait for a bus – behind them stark, branchless trees in the distant background visually echo the tall industrial chimneys of a factory formerly run by the people's commune also in the frame, a grim image, argues Xiaoping Lin, that recalls Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward launched three decades previously.[267] Lin suggests that 'because Xiao Wu's journey starts from here – that is, the ruins of the socialist past – he is doomed to turn into a 'residual' figure unfit for China's new reform-era.'[268] While Xiao Wu does have a spectral-like presence throughout the film, the idea of Fenyang itself as a haunted landscape is also suggested in this scene by the use of disjunctive sound and image.

The juxtaposition of sound and image in this scene in *Xiao Wu* provides a clear example of Stam's notion of film sound and image 'haunting' each other. As discussed in Chapter One, the political implications of these ideas about film form have particular resonance for films produced in cultures of censorship, which tend to privilege linear approaches to the narrativisation of experience. This sense of a singular 'party-line' is destabilised in Jia's films thematically through the exploration of the heterogeneity of subjective memory, and formally, through the disjunctive use of sound and image which, as Stam suggests, reconceptualises lived space-time as heterochronic.[269] In the scene described above, while the image evokes the socialist past through the positioning of the protagonists against the remains of the factory, the soundtrack articulates the concerns of the present and anxieties about the future, producing a sense of divergent temporalities. Wenwei Du describes

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[267]The Great Leap Forward campaign began optimistically in 1958 but ended two years later after causing an economic and humanitarian disaster. Its memory has since been the source of bitterness and deep mistrust amongst the poorest of China's vast population towards the government. See Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After,* op cit., p. 229.

[268] Xiaoping Lin, 'Jia Zhangke's Cinematic Trilogy: A Journey across the Ruins of Post-Mao China' in Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (eds.), *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics.* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), p. 191.

[269] In his essay, '*Xiao Wu*: Watching Time Go By', Chris Berry has also attempted to define how time can be understood and theorised in postsocialist China, and how this experience is (or *can be*) articulated in its cinema. Resonating with the conceptualisation of space-time as 'multiple' or 'haunted' in the work of Bliss Cua Lim, Berry argues for an understanding of time in postsocialist cinema as 'differential'. As he writes, ''differential time' insists that diverse understandings of time can exist alongside each other.' In Jia's early films set in the reform-era such as *Xiao Wu* and *Platform*, the grand narrative of Maoist socialism still casts a shadow over the films' protagonists who are caught in a temporal no-man's-land between 'old' and 'new' China. See Chris Berry, '*Xiao Wu*: Watching Time Go By' in Chris Berry (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus II*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 251.

xiaopin as a theatrical genre that incorporated local dialect spoken drama (*huaju*), pantomime, and gestures from traditional Chinese theatre (such as Beijing Opera), and became very popular during the reform-era in response to the rapid changes being experienced.[270] While many Chinese lost patience with the slow-paced didacticism of traditional Maoist drama, the quick-paced, lively entertainment offered by the xiaopin reflected more closely their own lives and concerns, deploying parody or satire to critique contemporary social phenomena. As Du explains, this included as a recurrent theme, the change in people's behaviour and attitudes as a result of the growth of commercialism, an anxiety that is also central to *Xiao Wu*. In this opening scene, the quick-fire pace of the satirical soundtrack conflicts with the slow (even static) pace of the diegetic space witnessed on the image, which is dominated by characters waiting (an activity that often seems to stretch out and elongate time). It is not until Xiao Wu arrives in the town centre of Fenyang that the pace of the two tracks (sound and image) catch up with each other, becoming synchronised.

Like *Platform, Xiao Wu* documents a period of turbulent transition in China's recent history. Set towards the end of the 1990s, it is a story about a petty criminal in his late twenties or early thirties who is a social misfit in the 'New China'. Xiao Wu is also a deeply sentimental character unable to 'let go of the past.'[271] Profoundly hurt that he has not been invited to his former best friend's society wedding (Xiao Yong, once a fellow pickpocket, now a highly regarded 'model entrepreneur', although ironically, also heavily involved in organised crime), Xiao Wu regards this rejection as a betrayal of the filial bond they made as young thieves together in Beijing. The film's narrative operates around the tension between a rhetoric of progress exemplified by the public's attitude towards successful businessman Xiao Yong, and the public rejection of Xiao Wu the pickpocket, whose nostalgic attachment to the past places him within a temporal and ideological no-man's land.[272]

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[270] Wenwei Du, 'Xiaopin: Chinese Theatrical Skits as Both Creatures and Critics of Commercialism', *The China Quarterly*, 154 (June, 1998), pp. 382 – 399.

[271] Jiwei Xiao, 'The Quest for Memory', op. cit.

[272] The irony of this juxtaposition, however, highlights some of the difficulties of China's transition. While Xiao Yong is publicly celebrated, appearing on state television to announce his wedding and his

This sense of ideological (or moral) dislocation during this period of China's social and economic reform is expressed formally in the film through the discordant juxtaposition of the sound and image tracks in a scene that links the two men through sound and mise-en-scène. The scene, which takes place just before Xiao Yong's wedding, begins with the piercing sound of his mobile phone ringtone as a mutual friend calls to try and persuade him to reconsider inviting Xiao Wu. Evidently disturbed by the phone call, Xiao Yong paces backwards and forwards in front of a wall outside his house that has been scored with height lines and inscribed with the date '1982'. As he hangs up, he reaches up to touch the lines on the wall. The film then cuts to a long shot of Xiao Wu sitting in the street, a shot that metaphorically underscores his distance from Xiao Yong's new life (and by association, from the 'new China'). Juxtaposed against a close-up of his hands (rather than admitting his true occupation as a pick-pocket, his running joke in the film is that he is an 'artisan' who 'works with his hands'), the pop song 'Farewell My Concubine' begins on the soundtrack.[273] Played on an old, worn cassette tape that has become stretched over time through repeated play, the distorted quality of the sound creates a sense of time itself being physically drawn out (similar to the sense of 'suspended time' that pervades the soundtrack of *Platform*). While the soaring chorus, steady beat and inflated electronic orchestration of the song gives it a sense of epic grandeur (perhaps on some level emulating the theatricality of public discourse in both the revolutionary period and also in the reform-era), the distorted sound of the tape contradicts this aesthetic, producing a sense of the uncanny.

As I discussed earlier, as well as capturing the mood of an era, music also has the ability to evoke intimate, personal memories when something about a song's melody or timbre (often unconsciously) brings to mind associations with particular

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large donation to the 'Hope Project', a local charity, it is heavily insinuated within the film's narrative that he is involved with corrupt officials, gaining his wealth from the importation of illegal goods and from the sex industry. While Xiao Yong has rejected the socialist implications of their 'sworn brotherhood' and embraced the capitalist ideology of individualism (as well as rejecting Xiao Wu himself), Xiao Wu's intransigent refusal to let go of the socialist past is illustrated by his insistence on sticking to his promise of a monetary wedding gift he made to Xiao Yong when they were both poor – a gesture now meaningless to everyone but Xiao Wu in light of Xiao Yong's abundant wealth and his own comparative poverty.

[273] The source of the music is not visible at this point, and its loud volume and even level as the characters move around the onscreen space suggest that it is non-diegetic; however, the uncertainty here adds to the sense of dislocation in the scene.

people or moments from the past. While these may, of course, be happy memories, the backward glance they occasion is often tinged with sadness as it pulls us back to a lost moment that can never be recaptured. As Pam Cook has described, this divergent temporal pull is the essence of nostalgia. In *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*, Cook defines nostalgia as 'a state of longing for something that is known to be irretrievable, but is sought anyway. In so far as it is rooted in disavowal, or suspension of disbelief, nostalgia is generally associated with fantasy.'[274] As Cook suggests, there is something intrinsically melancholy about nostalgia – but more than this, it also carries a sense of fantasy or self-delusion. This mood pervades *Xiao Wu* – even in scenes where the central character seems happy, it is very much a transient happiness grounded in denial – such as when he falls in love with Mei Mei, a call girl with bigger plans. This sense of melancholy is enhanced by the use of diegetic pop music at several points in the film, but in this scene in particular, the mood created by the stretched out, distorted sound heightens our sense of Xiao Wu's 'obsessive desire to recapture the past', which we know is doomed to fail.[275] While the bombastic quality of the sound of the song seems to capture Xiao Wu's perception of himself as morally superior to his former friend because of his 'honourable' commitment to their shared past, the distortion on the track registers this as delusional – he alone holds onto this outdated moral code. Importantly, therefore, Xiao Wu's nostalgia seems to express the wider tension that is evident throughout the film between the social codes of the communist past and those of the reform-era as he seems perpetually trapped by circumstance – unwilling, and seemingly unable, to move on.

Against the music, a hand-held point-of-view camera replicates Xiao Wu's drunken gaze as he moves unsteadily through the narrow passageway towards Xiao Yong's house, the camera turning momentarily to replicate his look as he glances at the markings on the wall. Xiao Wu then moves into the frame and, echoing his friend's earlier gesture, stretches out his hand to briefly touch them before walking away. As the film cuts to a shot of Xiao Wu standing in a busy street opposite a stall

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[274] Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 2.
[275] Ibid., p. 8.

selling ghetto blasters (bearers of the reform-era's burgeoning potential for a more heterogeneous soundscape), the music's source is located, ending abruptly when the stop button on one of the machines is pressed. After pick-pocketing one of the stall's customers, Xiao Wu walks home whistling the song to himself and on the way passes a group of children who are singing a skipping rhyme. This layering of sounds, against the memory of the song's questioning lyrics, '*Who is the hero now?*' suggests that, like the demolition of Fenyang's old town centre where empty spaces proliferate as nothing is built in their place, Xiao Wu's inability to position himself within the discourse of the new China makes him a spectral presence – a residual figure from the past who continues to 'haunt' the present.

Acoustic Space and Power

Deploying the documentary method of recording 'direct sound', sound designer Yang Zhang produces a soundtrack in *Xiao Wu* (and in *Platform* and *Unknown Pleasures*) that is characterised by a sense of the contingent – sometimes resulting in a disorientating acoustic space that emphasises aural texture over clarity.[276] This approach destabilises the orchestrated aural hierarchy characteristic of classical cinema that historically has tended to place greater emphasis on transparency.[277] Adopting the *xianxhang* (shooting live) aesthetic first used by the New Documentary Film Movement in China, these films place far greater importance on the pro-filmic and the contingent, foregrounding a sense of the phenomenology of sound. As I shall go on to argue, this filming practice and its aesthetic have significant political implications in relation to the representation of the power dynamics of lived space.

The relationship between sound and power is discussed at length by Jacques Attali in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* in which he argues that

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[276] Yang Zhang was responsible for the sound in Jia's documentaries, *Useless* (*Wuyong*, 2007) and *Dong* (2006), as well as his feature films *24 City* (*Er shi si cheng ji,* 2008), *The World* (*Shijie*, 2004), *Unknown Pleasures* (*Ren xiao yao*, 2002), *Platform* (*Zhantai*, 2000) and *Xiao Wu* (1997).

[277] See Elena Pollacchi, 'The Sound of the City: Chinese Films of the 1990s and Urban Noise' in Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (eds.), *Cities in Transition and the Modern Metropolis* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), p. 193.

> any organization of sounds is…a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality. It is what links a power centre to its subjects, and thus, more generally, it is an attribute of power in all of its forms…[T]he monopolization of the broadcast of messages, the control of noise, and the industrialization of the silence of others assure the durability of power.[278]

The impression of acoustic totalitarianism in the scene that takes place when Xiao Wu arrives in Fenyang near the beginning of the film graphically illustrates Attali's argument, demonstrating sound's function as a 'consolidator' of power. In this scene, the first sounds we hear are of an authoritative male voice interrupting the sound of a pop song being broadcast over public loudspeakers in the street. While the image track shows Xiao Wu with a crowd of people reading from a notice-board about the 'crackdown' on criminal behaviour in the town, an acousmatic voice begins: 'This announcement is presented by Public Security and the Justice Department concerning the self-denunciation of criminals.' As the reverberation of the voice resonates around this space, other street sounds such as the rumble of car and motorbike engines combine with it to produce a cacophonic acoustic environment.

The ability of sound to make material the abstract notion of power, and to both map out and 'occupy' territory, asserting control over its 'subjects' is demonstrated in the latter part of this scene when Xiao Wu hitches a lift on the back of a friend's bicycle. As the camera films them in a tracking shot as they cycle along, they are shown to be physically moving further away from the source of the voice (projected from the overhead speaker), and yet, contradicting the physical laws of aural perspective, the sound of the broadcast does not quieten as we would expect, but remains at a constant volume. This effect produces a sense that the sound *travels with them* and alludes to the omnipresence of the voice of authority, which although produced from a centre of power that is *elsewhere* is at the same time perceived by the subject *everywhere*. Although we do see the loudspeakers, because we do not see the source of the voice itself, this uncertainty supports a sense of power as being omnipresent. Michel Chion describes how the disembodied voice in cinema, while seeming to have no origin, is both powerful and seemingly ubiquitous

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[278] Jacques Attali, 'Listening' in Mark M. Smith (ed.), *Hearing History: A Reader*, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2004), p. 14.

as acousmêtre: 'a sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen.'[279] Occupying an ambiguous place – being neither on nor off the screen – the acousmêtre usually manifests itself in film as a powerful force whose position of power is assured by its invisibility as it is always just out of view. It is the sense of 'in-betweeness' that gives the acousmêtre its uncanniness; as Chion describes, 'Being in the screen and not, wandering the surface of the screen without entering it, the acousmêtre brings disequilibrium and tension.'[280]

The pervasive atmosphere of control in *Xiao Wu* and *Platform* continues into Jia's next film *Unknown Pleasures* (*Ren xiao yao*, 2002). The film takes place around the post-industrial mining town of Datong in northern Shanxi in the northeast of China. It is a living graveyard of decaying buildings, semi-completed construction work and unfinished roads-to-nowhere. On the edge of town, tomblike industrial chimneys are scattered across the barren landscape, while electricity pylons stand by like scarecrows. This location is experienced by the two lead protagonists, teenagers Bin Bin and Xiao Ji, as a space of dislocation and inertia.

In contrast to *Xiao Wu* and *Platform*, figures of authority in *Unknown Pleasures* have only a peripheral presence until close to the end of the film, appearing just once near the beginning, when a petty crook (also named Xiao Wu) is arrested by plain-clothes police.[281] However, as in the earlier films, the acoustic space of Datong also has the pervasive feeling of being 'occupied', but interestingly, here it is less by the official sounds of authority than by the Siren-like calls of consumerism – a subtle shift in the soundscape that documents a distinct ideological shift within the public sphere that characterised the reform-era. These newer sounds, however, are no less oppressive in their tone and mode of address.

At the time of Xiao Wu's arrest, for example, the sounds of a promotion for the Datong Lottery are broadcast over a nearby loudspeaker outside the bus terminal building, while the protagonists are shown in long shot standing idly in front of the entrance. Firstly, a male voice announces: 'The Shanxi Charity Lottery uses the

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[279] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, translated by Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 23.
[280] Ibid., pp. 23 – 4.
[281] As this Xiao Wu is also played by Wang Hongwei we can assume him to be the same character who appeared in Jia's earlier film.

latest technology to draw winners…Try the lottery and make your leisure time pay.'
A woman's voice joins in, and in a spoken harmony eerily reminiscent of the xiaopin
sketch on the soundtrack at the beginning of *Xiao Wu*, they proclaim: 'The Shanxi
Charity Lottery wishes you the best of luck!' – just at the moment when two
policemen run up to Xiao Wu and arrest him. With ironic resonance, against the
heavy drone of traffic – engines, squeaking breaks and horns beeping, and the sound
of the police siren – brass instruments can be heard playing jubilant trills and
flourishes just beneath the announcers' acousmatic voices.

In contrast to the effect of reverb created by the acoustic dynamics of the
cavernous, empty spaces in Datong (such as inside the bus terminal building that is
used as a setting for several scenes in the film), here the distortion of the projected
voices (most likely caused by the loudspeakers' inability to cope with the excessive
volume at which the recording is being broadcast) creates the impression of short
delay reverb, which has a very different resonance and symbolic function. If we
imagine shouting, and then our voices echoing back to us after the sound waves hit a
wall some distance away, the effect is a long delay reverb – and because of the
spatial and temporal distance the sound has to travel, it can give the impression of
time being slowed down. However, if we imagine performing the same action and
the sound waves of our voices hitting a wall directly in front of our faces, this echo
would return to our ears much more quickly because it has to travel less spatial and
temporal distance. The doubling up of sound through short delay reverb therefore
creates the impression of sound being oppressively *close to the body*, aggressive and
insistent as opposed to the distancing, otherworldly quality of long delay reverb
associated with the acoustic dynamics of empty space**.** For this scene in *Unknown
Pleasures*, therefore, the use of sound creates a sense of oppressive control – not
through evidence of physical restraint but through the *feeling* that the sound
recreates.

Postsocialist Soundscapes

As Jia's more recent films (from *The World* onwards) illustrate, following China's 'economic miracle' the experience of time shifted as the nation's grand narrative became driven more straightforwardly by capitalist objectives. Despite this shift, as Chris Berry notes, Jia's protagonists are nonetheless still 'passengers' of 'China's post-socialist project', often still 'onlookers on the roadside, watching as it passes them by.'[282] These characters are therefore now doubly haunted – by memories of the socialist past as much as by a future that excludes them. Time, for them, is thus experienced as fragmented and multiple as they become caught in the slipstream of China's progress narrative. This fragmented experience of temporality is registered formally in Jia's later films through their use of sound.

The World (*Shijie,* 2004) portrays the experiences of a group of migrants from Shanxi province living and working at 'The World' Theme Park in Beijing as performers and security guards. During the course of the film's narrative, the grim realities beneath the park's glamorous veneer are exposed; for while the workers spend their days moving through its hyperreal landscape, at night they sleep in dirty, overcrowded dormitories. Dotted around the park, miniaturised reproductions of iconic landmarks from around the globe, such as the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal and London Bridge, form the backdrop to tourists' holiday snaps, adding ironic weight to the park's claim: 'Give us a day, we will show you the world.' For many of the park's workers, despite its outward rhetoric of travel and exploration, the lived space of the park is experienced as just as insular and oppressive as that of Fenyang and Datong represented in Jia's earlier work.

In dialogue with Jia's earlier film, *Platform*, *The World* also uses the motif of the train to evoke the subjective experience of time and space, here expressing a sense of economic and social entrapment symbolised by the monorail, which seems to glide ethereally and soundlessly around the park's periphery. In one scene, we see one of the film's central protagonists, the dancer Tao, onboard, framed in front of a seemingly infinite succession of carriage windows – a shot that visually simulates the

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[282] Chris Berry, '*Xiao Wu*: Watching Time Go By' in Chris Berry (ed.), *Chinese Films in Focus II* (Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 251.

absent rhythm of the train tracks. Through the speaker system the soft, mollifying acousmatic voice of a young woman begins: 'Welcome aboard the World Park Monorail…it circles the park completely. The ride lasts fifteen minutes'. Overlaying this pre-recorded diegetic sound, a melancholy Spanish guitar plays a repetitive riff on the non-diegetic score, formally embodying the physical sensation of movement and circularity that the diegetic voice describes, while melodically expressing the sadness evident in Tao's face.

The motif of the train recurs when Tao's old boyfriend Liangzi, visits her from Fenyang on his way to catch a train to Mongolia, and Taisheng (Tao's current boyfriend) insists that they give him a lift to the station.[283] In this postmodern acoustic space, as they make their awkward goodbyes announcements of departures and arrivals emitted from overhead loud speakers seem to merge with the sounds of the sanitised soft rock booming out from large video screens advertising the latest fashions – ambient sounds which together seem to bounce off the station's glossy surfaces like reflected light. Towards the end of this scene, as Liangzi goes up the escalator and disappears from view, these sounds are juxtaposed against a seemingly non-diegetic sound of a train in aural close-up. Although a fitting sound for this setting, there is something distinctly uncanny about its presence on the soundtrack at this moment as the sound of its creaking and rattling carriages oddly dislocates it from the space-time of the image and from the other ambient sounds by infusing it with a sense of *pastness* which seems anachronistic to the *futurist* iconography of the station.

Perhaps making an inter-textual reference to the aged material quality of the train sound in Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (*Tôkyô monogatari*, 1953), (a connection that becomes more apparent later in the film), this appears to be a train from a completely different era (although we never get to see it). This disjuncture of sound and image provides an example of the sense of nonsynchronous temporality produced by the interplay of sound and image as described by Stam. In this scene, as the sound seems to *haunt* the image, this temporal heterogeneity destabilises the state's conception of time as linear progression, while foregrounding a sense of the

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[283] Significantly, Liangzi is the first person Tao has ever met with a passport.

complexity of the train as a symbol of both mobility and entrapment (a theme previously addressed in *Platform*). By pointing to the failed promises of modernity in postsocialist China as evinced by the film's portrayal of the marginalisation of its migrant workers, the film signals the disruptive nature of the ghost motif both formally and ideologically.

The sound of rattling carriages bleeds over the image as the film cuts to a shot of Taisheng's dormitory (now seeming to be more obviously diegetic). The proximity of the train to the migrants' living space in a downbeat corner of the city (on the 'wrong side of the tracks') is emphasised by the prominence of this sound on the soundtrack. Li Zhang writes that, even though migrants provide cheap labour that is in high demand in China's economic centres, 'multiple layers of social and political tensions exist between migrant newcomers, the state, and urban society', and that the perceived need to control 'this large mobile and unmanageable population' has resulted in the development and heightened use of strategies with which to regulate lived space.[284] This regulation of migrant space is suggested by the visual mise-en-scène of Taisheng's cramped and gloomy dormitory, which is framed by a series of vertical and horizontal lines that underscore a sense of order and containment. Importantly, however, it is also conveyed through the interplay of sound and image, which creates a heightened sense of the tension between stillness (or stasis) and movement (or dynamism). While the force of the train sound seems to shake the entire building, two women with whom Taisheng shares the space fan themselves in the oppressive heat. As they do so, their bodies seem to move in synch with the repetitive rhythm of the train's movement heard through the thin walls, as if they are so close to it (symbolically, the sound of modernity and hence 'progress') that, unconsciously, they are dominated and controlled by it – while *disjunctively*, the visual framing reminds us of their static social position.[285]

The repression of subjectivity evoked by this juxtaposition is perhaps illustrative of the experience of the migrant workers more generally on their arrival to the city. As Taisheng lies back on his narrow bed, the sound of the train seems to

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[284] Li Zhang, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks within China's Floating Population* (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 1 – 2.
[285] This movement recalls the slight sway of Mingliang's mother in synchrony with her sewing machine in a scene in *Platform* (the rhythm of 'industry').

bring back memories of Taisheng's own experience of rail travel when he first arrived in Beijing from Fenyang, as he tells Tao: 'I followed you to Beijing. Right off the train, I slept here on this hard bed…That first night in Beijing, I lay in this bed listening to the trains'. This comment, which he does not take any further, points to the complexity of emotions experienced on arriving in the city for the first time, as the 'utopian' promise bound up with the train sound is ironised by the economic reality of becoming part of Beijing's 'floating population', existing on the borderline of society. This scene, and indeed the film as a whole, is characterised by a pervasive sense of disappointment as the migrants' reality fails to live up to the promises of prosperity made during the reform-era. The juxtaposition of sound and image in this scene, therefore, relates very clearly to Stam's idea that sound can haunt the image, 'orchestrat[ing] multiple, even contradictory, histories, temporalities, and perspectives' as the mise-en-scène encapsulates sonically and visually a sense of divergent temporalities: the promises of the past that motivated the migrants to move to the city juxtaposed against the reality of their present situation, while at the same time haunted by a future that excludes them (the continuation of China's 'economic miracle').

The association of the sound of the train with the marginalisation of migrant workers and the suppression of their human rights (well documented in Li Zhang's book) and the association of sound with the motif of haunting continues later in the film when Tao receives a text message from Taisheng telling her about the death of his cousin. Little Sister (another migrant worker), we learn has died as a result of an industrial accident at the building site where he worked, owing to exploitative work practices. As she reads the text (shown on screen in animation), the film cuts to an animated shot and recorded sound of a freight train rushing past, with the image of a map of the world sketched onto the side of each of its carriages.[286] This short sequence is followed by a cut to a waiting room at the bus station where the bereaved family are waiting to be met, having travelled to the city from their home in Shanxi province. Stunned by their son's death, they accept the pay-off money

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[286] A visual trope of the film is to shift to cartoon animation when characters send or receive text messages. This technique is perhaps intended to create a sense of an alternative space of possibility that is not conceivable in the lived experience of the park.

from his former employer and silently wipe away their tears. The soundtrack makes a further reference at this point to Ozu as it cuts to Kojun Saitô's score for *Tokyo Story* (an intertextual 'haunting' confirming the close relationship between the two films) as the image moves to Taisheng and Little Sister's family at sunset at the construction site where he died.[287] As they perform a quiet mourning ritual, the swelling, empathetic sound of non-diegetic strings (infused again with a sense of *pastness* through its warm crackly tone) intersect on the soundtrack with the faint, indifferent sounds of police sirens and traffic noise emanating from the busy Beijing streets below. As his parents sit together in silence, the absence of their voices makes them appear symbolically distant in both time and space as the sounds of the city fill the acoustic space just as if the couple were not there, leaving them to appear like ghosts hovering powerlessly above the city.

The migrant's experience of liminality as a kind of ghostliness is taken to its conclusion in the final scene of the film, in which Taisheng and Tao are found dead as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning while Tao is flat-sitting for a friend. After being brought outside and laid on the snow-covered ground by anxious neighbours, the screen fades to black, and Taisheng asks, 'Are we dead?' to which Tao responds, 'No, this is just the beginning'. This disjunctive use of sound and image illustrates (and literalises) Stam's notion of textual and formal haunting. Just as the presence of ghosts offers a radical disruption of the homogeneity of linear conceptualisations of space and time, as I have suggested, Stam's model opens up the possibilities for politicised readings of film form. According to Colin Davis, ghosts 'divest perceptible reality of its material or transcendental grounding; and they thrust us into a world of appearances and apparitions in which at the same time everything is only what it seems and nothing is quite what it seems'.[288] In this scene in *The World*, therefore, the voices of the dead symbolically destabilise the rhetorical certainties of 'new

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[287] In an interview in *Frieze Magazine*, Jia comments: 'In *Shijie*…which reflects on the global imagery resonant in contemporary China, I quoted the soundtrack from Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Monogatari* (*Tokyo Story*, 1953) because I admired Ozu's portrayal of familial relations and societal transformation. Japan in the 1950s, Taiwan in the 1980s, China in the 1990s: different films, different eras, different countries, all united by a synchronicity of modernity.' Jia Zhangke in 'Life in Film: Jia Zhangke', *Frieze Magazine*, 106 (April 2007)
http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/life_in_film_jia_zhangke/ [accessed 15.12.09]
[288] Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 46

China' by divesting the reality of the film's diegetic world of its 'groundedness' and by ending the film with *questions* rather than any kind of definitive conclusion. Thus, this ending seems to symbolically draw attention to the silences (and unanswered questions) that surround the social, economic and political iniquities that exist beneath the progress narrative of postsocialist China.

The connection between sound, 'industrialised' or 'regulated' time, and the body that is suggested in *The World* is made explicit in Jia's next film, *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren,* 2006). The film chronicles the disappearance, in the space of just two years, of the two thousand year old city, Fengjie, as part of the Three Gorges Project to form the world's largest hydro-electricity power plant across the Yangtze River. During this process, more than a million people were displaced as its infrastructure was manually pulled down to create a clear thoroughfare for vessels to pass through after the area is flooded. The film explores the effect of this dramatic upheaval on personal and familial relationships as it follows the parallel paths of two (unconnected) people who have both come to the region from Shanxi province in search of their estranged spouses: Han Sanming – a coal miner looking for his wife and their daughter, who ran away from him sixteen years ago; and Shen Hong – a nurse looking for her husband with whom she lost contact two years previously when he came to work in the area.

Visually, the depiction of the city is reminiscent of post-World War II 'rubble' films, such as Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (*Germania anno zero*, 1948). Like these films, *Still Life* depicts a desolate environment that appears to engulf the human body. With the use of on-location filming and the emphasis on exterior shots, *Still Life* is both a document of a disappearing physical space at a precise moment in history and of the fragility of the human subject within it. As the steady beat of their sledgehammers reverberates across the diegetic soundscape, the demolition workers' semi-nude bodies (who, like the protagonists in *The World*, are mainly economic migrants) are juxtaposed against the vast backdrop of the crumbling city. This composition articulates through visual and sonic metaphor the relegation of the subject within the state's grand narrative that characterised, and continues to surround, the rhetoric of the Three Gorges Project.

Establishing a very different atmosphere to that which pervades the 'Hometown Trilogy', *Unknown Pleasures* and *The World*, the opening sequence of *Still Life* begins in darkness as the soft sounds of a low melancholy foghorn, water gently lapping the side of the boat and the ambient hum of quiet conversation are heard on the soundtrack.[289] This is the Yangtze Ferry bringing economic migrants who have come to the region (some with their families) to take up modestly paid employment as demolition workers. The first image in the film is blurred, but as the camera slowly pans from left to right, the boat's passengers begin to come into focus. On the non-diegetic soundtrack, Lim Giong's ethereal score has a soft wistful melody that harmonises with the ambient diegetic sounds of passengers smoking and chatting, reading palms, playing cards, sending text messages and telling stories. In contrast to some of the regimented sounds heard in the earlier films that appear to impose a structure onto time, these unhurried sounds replicate aesthetically the fluid movement of the water. This connection with the natural world creates an impression of timelessness that seems to resist the velocity of the accelerating time of the city's demolition as perceived by its residents and evoked by the cacophonous street noise of downtown Fengjie. Here we can hear petty gangsters touting for business; heated arguments over bureaucracy; motorbike taxis and trucks rattling through the narrow, winding streets; tacky mobile phone ringtones; and television sets playing John Woo movies, period costume dramas and local news programmes. Together they produce a dense and dissonant soundscape that testifies to the chaos ensuing from the vast scale of the project.

The connection made on the soundtrack between the natural world and the feeling of timelessness is further underscored by the camerawork. As has been frequently observed by commentators on the film, measured horizontal panning shots of the expansive backdrop mimic the physical act of unrolling scrolls of traditional Chinese landscape painting and evoke a sense of the immensity of geological time as we imagine how little this view has changed over its history. This association seems to illustrate the way in which perception of landscape is shaped by

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[289] The 'Hometown Trilogy' includes *Xiaoshan huija* (*Xiao Shan Going Home*, 1995), *Xiao Wu* and *Platform*.

the imagination. In this way, landscapes become important in relation to the formation of cultural (and personal) memory, as Simon Schama points out:

> Although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are in fact, indivisible. Before it can be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is build up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock. [290]

As he goes on to explain, this 'idea of landscape' is rooted in a process of mythmaking that has the effect of 'muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents'. [291] In relation to the Three Gorges Project, representations of the Yangtze and the land around it have indeed historically played a fundamental part in the mythmaking that has shaped public life in the PRC since its inception at the end of the 1940s. In Mao Zedong's 1956 poem 'Swimming' for example, he describes looking across the gorge while swimming in the Yangtze, visualising the construction of the dam.[292] Ten years later, at the age of seventy-three, Mao made a very public demonstration of his physical fitness (and thus ability to head the Party) by swimming across the river himself (in a race with five thousand other young swimmers) in order to launch the Cultural Revolution and establish himself as a superhuman figure – launching the 'Cult of Mao' in the process.[293] Importantly, therefore, these scenes in *Still Life* encapsulate the indivisibility of the representation of 'landscape' from the ideological project embedded in the 'idea of landscape.' Aside from being simply a filmic representation of an area of outstanding natural beauty, the formal properties of these scenes (as both the camerawork *and sound* replicate the movement of water) are imbued with the historical and ideological connotations of the Revolutionary period and the 'strata' of public (or cultural) memory.

This dynamic is further underscored on the soundtrack by the use of ancient Chinese poetry recited over shots of one of the region's iconic gorges. When Shen

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[290] Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1996), p. 7.
[291] Ibid., p. 61
[292] See http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/poems/poems23.htm [accessed 10 January 2010].
[293] See Mao Zedong's 1966 'Swim of the Yangtze', an excerpt from Geramie Barmé's *Morning Sun* (2003). http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xN1P2DHE26g [accessed 10.01.10]

Hong leaves Fengjie, for example, as the passenger ferry cuts through the water of the Yangtze, the overhead loud speaker announces: 'Welcome to the Yangtze Jetfoil forest. We are now leaving Fengjie for Shanghai. As long ago as the Tang dynasty, the great poet Li Bai wrote these lines: '*From the walls of Baidi high in the coloured dawn/To Jiangliang by nightfall is a journey of one thousand miles. / Yet the cry of monkeys from the riverbank behind me / Carries to my tiny boat*'. These sounds of ancient verse are incorporated into the propagandist rhetoric of the Three Gorges Project (thus making the connection between representation and ideology explicit) as the acousmatic voice continues: 'And now, thanks to the Three Gorges Dam, the eyes of the world are on this place again. The Three Gorges Dam has been a goal of our party leaders for years. The people living here have made a great sacrifice. On May 1st 2006, the water level here will rise to 156.3 metres. These little houses you see here will be submerged'. Against this audio commentary, archival video footage of former leaders Sun Zhongshan, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping's visits to the region is shown on a public television screen on board the boat.

A sense of multiple temporalities – the co-presence of the revolutionary past with the 'progressive' official discourse of the present – is further suggested through the film's sound design where the tension between nostalgia for the socialist past and the draw of capitalism is alluded to in a conversation between Sanming and a younger street-wise hustler whom he befriends called Brother Mark.[294] Through their conversation, a tangible sense of their self-perceived temporal dislocation in contemporary China begins to emerge. The younger of the two voices this anxiety as he says: 'You know what? Present society doesn't suit us.' Adopting the persona of Chow Yun Fat, he points his finger like a gun at Sanming across the table and says, 'Because we're too nostalgic'.[295]

After swapping mobile numbers they call each other; Han Sanming's ringtone is a compressed electronic version of an upbeat Maoist song entitled '*Bless*

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[294]Mark laughs at what he sees as Sanming's nostalgic sentimentality, having kept hold of an old cigarette packet with his wife's address written on it for the last sixteen years. When he does not recognise the brand Sanming tells him: 'We remember our own pasts.' Interestingly, this enigmatic response recalls Walter Benjamin valuing detritus as markers of the past in his *Arcades Project.*
[295] Chow Yun Fat is a Hong Kong actor well known in Asia for his portrayal of violent gangsters in John Woo genre films such as *A Better Tomorrow* (*Ying hung boon sik,* 1987)*, The Killer* (*Dip huet seung hung,* 1989) and *Hard Boiled* (*Lat sau san taam,* 1992).

Good Hearted People'. When he hears this, Brother Mark responds: 'Fuck *Good Hearted People* – there are none of those in Fengjie these days.' When in return Brother Mark plays him his ringtone, we hear a lone woman's melancholy voice sing: '*Waves flow, waves pound…the river runs for a thousand miles. It surges through our world of woes*'.[296] A cut to shot of a television screen in the corner of the room shows that it is playing documentary footage of the mass migration of Fengjie residents following the commencement of the dam project. Recalling the soundscape of the film's opening moments, the song encapsulates the movement of the river through both its lyrics and its mellifluous rhythm. This juxtaposition of sound and image, therefore, awkwardly (and deliberately) brings together the rhetorical construction of the Three Gorges as an iconic landmark in China's historical trajectory with public and official discourse about the country's future, while the visual (but peripheral) presence of a mass of tearful (but silent, thus ghostlike) Fengjie residents is seen being forcefully evicted from their homes – perceived by the mise-en-abyme as a further example of textual 'haunting'.[297]

The continuing concerns of history, memory, agency, and subjectivity that permeate Jia's work are dealt with most directly in *24 City* (*Er shi si cheng ji*, 2008). The film's narrative structure is organised around a series of interviews with former employees of Factory 420 – a once secret munitions plant in Chengdu, the capital of the Sichuan Province in Southwest China that is in the process of being demolished to make way for a hyper-modern entertainment, office and apartment complex. The protagonists provide an oral history of the factory by narrating their memories chronologically from its beginnings in the 1950s to the present day, as the film interweaves interviews with both real workers and actors playing composite characters whose stories traverse and collate the memories of several of the interviewees. Moving from the vast panoramic backdrop of *Still Life* to the cramped interior spaces of the factory and its surrounding buildings, the stories intersect the

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[296] Kin-Yan Szeto points out that this music is the theme song from a 1980s Hong Kong TV action series, *Shang hai tan* (*The Bund*). See Kin-Yan Szeto, 'A Moist Heart: Love, Politics and China's Neoliberal Transition in the Films of Jia Zhangke', *Visual Anthropology*, 22.2-3 (2009), pp. 95 – 107.
[297] The sound of Brother Mark's ringtone is heard once more in the film from beneath a pile of bricks at the demolition site after his death (although it is heavily insinuated that he did not die of natural causes). Completing the symbolic association of the river, close to the end of the film, his body is taken down the river on a boat, presumably to be returned to his family back home.

broad socio-historical events that resonated on a national as well as local level during this period with the minor details of subjective memory. This heteroglossic structure is Bakhtinian in both form and objective, as the multi-vocal narration repositions centrally those memories subsumed by the linearity of the state's grand narratives. Speaking of the effects of enforced migration on families and personal relationships, for example, they describe life during (and after) Mao's Great Leap Forward when family members were moved out to the countryside to work at 'people's communes' and of China's involvement in the Korean War when the factory and its workforce were relocated from the Northeast to Chengdu.

Like *Still Life*, *24 City* documents the rapid physical transformation of the environment as over the course of the film several of the factory buildings are turned to rubble. Demonstrating an acute awareness that the spaces of the workers' memories will be lost when the transformation of the factory is complete, the film attempts to capture this pervasive sense of evanescence by the recurrent use of dissolves and silent fades to black (which seem to occur at moments where the monologues have been at their most personal and emotional).[298] These stories, which all in some way articulate an experience of loss, contribute to a sense of collective mourning in the film. Jean Ma writes of Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness* (*Bei qing cheng shi*, 1989) that the film 'treats absence as a sign of history; given that this history consists of a series of denials of loss'.[299] Similarly, if *24 City* can be considered a document of unofficial, 'vernacular' history, it is one that is centred on a structuring absence, a formal lacuna that responds to the public denial of private loss in official discourse – a dynamic that is primarily registered through the film's use of sound.

The film begins with the start of a working day at the 420 Factory in the winter of 2007. A solitary bugle sounds a melancholy refrain across the film's opening credits, which documents the latter days of the factory's working life and gives voice to the testimonies of some of the 20,000 employees its closure will make

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[298] This sense of fragility is made all the poignant in light of the devastating earthquake that struck the city on May 12, 2008 shortly after filming was completed, reportedly killing at least 68,000 people and making a further 5 million homeless.

[299] Jean Ma, 'Photography's Absent Times' in Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (eds.), *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 111.

redundant. Evoking both the plant's past connection with the military and its present fading stature, this elegiac nondiegetic sound recurs throughout the film as a leitmotif. Here, the refrain merges with the diegetic sound of an old recording of a propaganda song being broadcast over the factory's loudspeaker system, across the iconic image of the factory gates. While the song's lyrics anticipate the future – '*Welcoming the sun of the new century, we workers at Chengfa raise our voices*' – and its tempo is upbeat, the sonic quality of the recording contradicts this, as, like the sound of Kojun Saitô's score for *Tokyo Story* heard in *The World*, its worn, crackly tone, characteristic of an old 78-rpm record, inflects it with a sense of temporal pastness. The impressions of fingerprints and scuffs as a result of repeated handling and play can be imagined as they seem to be etched onto the surface of the vinyl reaching the ear as a crackle, making audible the passage of time.

Due to the excessive amplification of the song as it is broadcast through the speakers, the sound is distorted further, underscoring a sense of temporal dislocation as the reverb gives the impression of time being slowed down. The tonal juxtaposition of the low bass sounds of the song with the high-pitched squeak of individual bicycle wheels as a mass of workers framed collectively, in long shot from above, cycle in an orderly fashion through the factory gates, indicates a tension between the individual subject and the ideology of collectivism that resonates throughout Jia's work. The diegetic music broadcast over the factory's loudspeaker system is centripetal, physically drawing in and unifying the individuals within the group.[300]

As the dayshift workers enter the building and ascend the crowded stairwell, the soft sound of their morning chatter forms a quiet ambient hum on the diegetic soundtrack. The workers then congregate in an assembly hall, for what turns out to be a momentous occasion in the life of the factory that ironically (as it seems like a celebration) signals its end: the ceremony for the transfer of land from Chengfa Group to China Resources Land Ltd. The gathered crowd sing heartily: '*The five star red flag flutters in the wind. How glorious our song of victory, singing for our beloved*

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[300] The role of sound in the synchronisation of the labour force is also alluded to by the ghostly presence of the bugle, which recalls the sound that would have announced the start of the day throughout their working life there.

motherland as she prospers and grows strong!' After firm applause, the speaker begins:

> 29th December 2007 will mark a glorious development of the Chengfa Group. For nearly fifty years we have grappled with difficulties and setbacks and the challenging breakthroughs of economic reform. Now a revitalised Chengfa Group is about to move from the site that it has occupied for fifty years.

The real effects of this rhetoric become more apparent as the narrative unfolds and several of the interviewees describe their experiences of redundancy. Again, this is registered through the soundtrack as the sound of solitary footsteps ascending one of the factory's stairwells indicates a significant shift away from the collective atmosphere of the auditorium, the slight echo of each step heightening a sense of its separateness. As He Xikun, the first of the workers to be interviewed, sits down in one of the factory's disused rooms, before beginning to speak he looks directly into the camera lens and audibly swallows. This seismic diegetic shift from the encompassing 'full' sound of the auditorium to the intense focus of this aural close-up creates, by contrast, a vivid sense of intimacy and closeness that has been rare in Jia's work up to now. It indicates a wider shift in focus in terms of scale, from mapping the complex discursive soundscapes of social space to the intimate, subjective sound-space of the body.[301]

In *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time,* Reinhart Koselleck poses the question: 'What is historical time?' answering: 'Whoever seeks to form an impression of historical time in everyday life may notice the wrinkles of an old man, or the scars in which a former fate is preserved'.[302] Like the scratches on the surface of the vinyl described above, as Koselleck suggests, the passage of time also etches itself onto the human body – a process made audible in a scene where He Xikun goes to visit his former mentor, now an elderly and very frail man. As the two men sit

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[301] Most of the interviews take place in small interior spaces; one woman for example tells her story on a bus, another in a hairdresser's salon, another man while sitting at a bar. Although these are public spaces, they are infused with a sense of intimacy through the closeness of the sound. Even when filmed in long shot the protagonists are framed within four walls, or against a mirror, which serves to fragment the visual space. This tight framing replicates both acoustically and visually the sense of claustrophobia of the lived space of the factory life suggested by some of the interviewees.
[302] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, op. cit., p. 1.

facing each other, Xikun waits expectantly to hear the old man speak, but instead his mentor avoids his look, as if shy or embarrassed, the only sound between them being the rattle of his lungs which fills their awkward silence. Coaxing him into talking, Xikun softly asks him three times: 'What have you got to say?' Through their fragmented dialogue, we learn that the old man had been with the factory from the very early days and worked extremely conscientiously – rarely taking days off. However, when asked to say more about his experiences, he says it is hard for him to remember: 'But I forget,' he says, 'My brain's rusty. Too slow. It was okay before, I used to remember things well.' Xikun assures him that he 'did a lot for the factory', leaning forward to speak closely into his ear so he can hear him. Listening intently, Xikun leans towards him and strokes the old man's hand tenderly, demonstrating a sense of empathy and profound respect. As the camera pans slowly across the man's frail body, resting at his face, he exhales gruffly like a tired old dog. He Xikun sniffs audibly and, blinking away tears, gently strokes the old man's hair; he then sighs and looks down as if in deep reflection while the rough sounds of his mentor's breath are heard on the soundtrack, juxtaposed against the sound of children playing outside heard through an open window. As He Xikun raises his head, the non-diegetic sound of the bugle plays over the sound of the old man's struggling breath, the interweaving diegetic and nondiegetic sounds linking the personal narratives of memory with the public history of the factory. Following Koselleck, perhaps then it could be said that the public history of the factory and the subjective memories of the old man (who has effectively shared his lifetime with that of the factory) converge at the site of the body. History, inscribed on the body through the scars on his lungs, is given voice through the sound of his rasping breath.

Such moments of narrative stillness as the protagonists narrate their memories are set in relief to the monotonous movement of the factory work captured on the soundtrack by the repetitive, mechanical 'clunk-chonk' sound of the machinery. In the work scenes of *24 City* no human voices are audible amid the cacophony of industry, as the fast, incessant cadence of the machinery dominates the soundscape. The absence of humanity indicated by the diegetic soundtrack is underscored by the camerawork, which focuses on close-ups of the machines; the sight of steam, flames and red heat; and on fragments of the workers' bodies which

are partly obscured by the machinery they operate. The impact of industrial noise on subjectivity is articulated in *24 City* when one of the interviewees, Su Na (the daughter of former employees of the factory, herself now a personal shopper for wealthy Chengdu urbanites), describes an occasion when she went to the factory looking for her mother. This monologue also demonstrates the powerful relationship between sound and memory:

> The noise was deafening. You had to shout to be heard. I looked around the place. But I couldn't see my mother. The staff were all wearing blue uniforms. Working with their heads bent down. I had to go up to every person. This one, then this one…trying to find which one was her. Finally I found her over in a corner, she was carrying ingots of steel, throwing them one after another into some boxes. Every time: 'Bam!' Every ingot landed with that noise. I had never felt more sad than I did at that moment. It was like a sharp pain suddenly striking my heart and it made all my limbs ache. My mother, I didn't even know if it was a man or a woman when I approached. The head was bent down.

24 City is a film structured through voices, but like Jia's earlier films, it is also about the silences that structure official accounts of history. At several points, the film pauses on an individual or group shot of people standing almost completely motionless, looking directly to the camera lens. In contrast to the industrial scenes described above, where the workers are framed in relation to the machinery they operate, here, significantly, their bodies are positioned centrally within the shot. These moments suspend the narrative, halting the flow of linear temporality. Jia describes the process of filming these scenes in an interview with Dudley Andrew:

> I had people sit in front of the camera, which I let run continuously for fifty minutes in silence. This is nothing like taking a still photo. For the most important thing is that, in the silence and through the camera, we are trying to capture the subtle changes of expression, to display the intense activities of the inner world…to look for certain kinds of traces and vestiges…During those three to five minutes of shooting, I felt as if we were mourning silently for the lives and the stories of the past. Later it became a ritual in our shooting. For me these portraits are not just people's faces nor some form complementary to their narration, nor even a mere ritual. For through that ritual we sense that many lives have been ignored, ordinary people's lives

ignored. We hope that through time, through silence, and through this ritual, the film can help these people achieve some recognition. [303]

Articulating what Derrida calls 'a politics of memory', this ritual of mourning, in remembering the dead, demonstrates a desire '[t]o live otherwise…more justly' not just in the present moment, but out of responsibility for the future. For Derrida, and seemingly for Jia too, 'no ethics, no politics…seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there.'[304]

Much of what has been written about stillness in cinema has been concerned with the presence of photographs in the frame, or the freeze-frame. Both have been repeatedly connected with mortality through the work of Roland Barthes, Laura Mulvey and Raymond Bellour, amongst others. However, while the tableaux vivants in *24 City* seem to have a similar effect of halting the flow of time, and have a parallel concern with mortality, the use of sound in these moments – specifically, their *autonomous silence* – bestows on them a different resonance to both of these forms, which *have silence impressed upon them*. While Garrett Stewart refers to the freeze frame in cinema as 'desubjectified memory' because the image is distanced by way of its disjunctive temporality from 'the fictional world of the diegesis', here the stilled image as a *continuation* of the space-time of the diegesis (time moves on while the protagonists stand still) seems to have the opposite effect, emphasising the protagonists' subjectivity by drawing attention to their *embodied presence*.[305]

Each stray sound emitted by the body – such as a swallow, a sniff or a cough – is picked up in aural close-up, just as every slight conscious or unconscious gesture is registered across the surface of the protagonists' bodies, thus reinforcing this sense of embodied *presentness*. While the absence of speech in these scenes ironically mimics the deliberate silencing of dissident voices in China's public domain, in a context where time is measured in terms of productivity and is regimented sonically by the persistent ticking of the clock, the unmeasured nature of time in

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[303] Jia Zhangke interviewed by Dudley Andrew, *Film Quarterly*, 62.4 (2009), p. 82.
[304] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, op. cit.
[305] Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo-Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 18.

these quiet scenes, in which such organised sound is absent, provides an opportunity to pause and reflect. Through their careful juxtaposition of sound and image, these scenes' insistence on presentness (Benjamin's 'presence of now') halts the relentless forward movement of the progress narrative of official discourse that has historically been encoded in the rhythmic sounds of industry and clock-time. I argue therefore that these moments of quiet stillness instead embody the 'now-time' that Benjamin speaks of in his 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History': 'History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous empty time, but is filled by the presence of now'.[306] Jia's disenfranchised characters occupy a space of liminality characterised by a sense of time that does not, *for them*, form a smooth coherent line of experience, but is fractured, nonsynchronous, and discordant. The political dimension is, therefore, ironically heightened by the *absence* of voice in these moments in *Still Life*, as the workers' silent gaze seems to insist that their presence in this story – the 'nowness' of this moment in Chinese history – is not drowned out by the noisy, homogenising rhetoric of the state.

Conclusion

Amid the staccato rhythm of industry and 'progress' – the relentless downbeat of demolition, the noise of hustling tricksters, and the Siren-call of consumerism – Jia's spectral soundscapes create a temporal pause – a symbolic space of resistance to the relentless linear trajectory of the grand narrative of postsocialist China. This chapter has traced the evolving soundscapes of modern China from the end of the Cultural Revolution through to the present as represented in the films of Jia Zhangke. In so doing, I hope to have demonstrated how close attention to the unruly potential of film sound can open up our understanding of the politics embedded in film form as well as the power dynamics of acoustic space. A closer investigation of the use of sound in the 'memory films' of Apichatpong Weerasethakul will need to draw on theories of embodied spectatorship and explore the relationship between

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[306] Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 252.

sound's material quality and its affective nature in film in relation to questions of personal, cultural and generational memory (and forgetting). Crucially, I will argue, Apichatpong's films' phenomenological appeal encourages an ethical encounter with the film.

Chapter Four

Affect, Sound and Memory in the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul

> The majority of our historical documents mainly portray royal lifestyle, rarely the commoners. If we are to be able to look back to the past, there should have been historical films about ordinary people… it's a matter of politics.
>
> – Apichatpong Weerasethakul[307]

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Mysterious Object at Noon* (*Dokfa nai meuman*, 2000) begins silently with an intertitle: 'Once Upon a Time' – signalling that what is to come will have its roots in the ancient storytelling traditions of oral culture and the folk tale. The image then cuts to a view from behind the windscreen of a small van driving on a ring road towards the centre of Bangkok. Filmed in black and white and in 16mm, the natural daylight gives the over-exposed image a grainy textural feel that foregrounds its material quality. Through the window, the camera snatches glimpses of the city as tower blocks, market stalls, parked cars, bicycles, pedestrians, and street vendors pass by. Like the image, the 'grain' of the film's soundscape is also foregrounded as the fleeting ambient sounds – a discordance of car horns, motorbike exhausts, and voices – converge at the point of audition from within the moving vehicle, immersing the audio-viewer in a world of transient sonority.

On the van's radio, a soft, minor chord struck on an electric guitar is followed by a woman's voice singing a melancholy love song. Against this, a male voice begins to narrate the quasi-tragic events of an ill-fated soap opera romance: as he speaks his soft voice merges with the muted sounds of the other vehicles on the road:

> The accident that night made him long for her. He could not sleep, eat, or even work. Where was she hiding from him? How could she forget that night? … [W]hen he finally found her, he almost went crazy because she was about to marry another man. He told himself not to give up...*Tomorrow, I will love you.*

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[307] Apichatpong Weerasethakul cited in Anchalee Chaiworaporn, 'A Perceiver of Sense: Apichatpong Weerasethakul', ThaiCinema.org http://www.thaicinema.org/Essays_07apichatpong.asp [accessed 03.03.11]

The van drives further into the narrow streets and the passing sounds of motorbikes become louder. These sounds merge with an advertisement on the radio for 'Chatra Lotus' incense sticks followed briefly by the beginnings of a pop song, abruptly turned off by the driver. The film begins by drawing the audio-viewer into the world of the imagination (a place of no particular time), before immersing them in a rich montage of sounds where a number of different narratives call to the listener, interwoven with the textural ambient sounds of everyday life.[308]

In previous chapters I have discussed how film sound can articulate a sense of a character's subjectivity and how it can transpose the soundscapes of lived space into the diegetic world of film. I have also suggested ways in which film sound can express the complex relationship between memory and history. In this chapter, I investigate further how the use of sound in film can articulate 'how it feels to remember'. Drawing on theories of embodied spectatorship, I explore the role of affect and sound in Apichatpong's films as I trace the themes of personal, cultural and generational memory (and forgetting) in his work. Apichatpong's films share with those of Bahman Ghobadi and Jia Zhangke a thematic concern with memory and the politics of voice and, in his most recent work, with the problematic relationship between memory and official history. Made during a period of continued political unrest in Thailand, in a culture policed by strict lèse majesté censorship laws, his work (like Ghobadi and Jia's) tends to focus on the experiences and memories of those on the social and political periphery, such as characters from Thailand's impoverished northeast, migrant workers, gay men, older women, and children – whose voices are generally absent from public discourse.[309] His most

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[308]Michel de Certeau speaks of this constant flow of the sounds of modernity as 'haunt[ing] streets and buildings.' See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 186.

[309] See Thitinan Pongsudhirak, 'Thailand in Yellow and Red' http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/pongsudhirak4/English posted 18.03.11 [accessed 20.03.11] for a very clear analysis of the political situation as it currently stands. Since the 1997 economic crisis, Thailand has witnessed a period of extreme political unrest resulting in the violent deaths of many hundreds of civilians in events that resound historically with the bloody suppression of popular uprisings in 1973, 1976, and 1992. See Thitinan Pongsudhirak, 'Thailand Since the Coup', *Journal of Democracy*, 19.4 (October 2008), pp. 140 – 153; Thongchai Winichakul 'Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past' in Shigeharu Tanabe and Charles F. Keyes (eds.), *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), pp. 243 – 283; and Sudarat Musikawong, 'Art for October: Thai Cold War State Violence in Trauma Art', *positions: east asia culture critique*, 18. 1 (Spring, 2010), pp. 19 – 50.

recent work, the 'Primitive Project' moves towards a more explicitly historical framework as it is concerned with memories of Thailand's violent past that have largely been 'forgotten' in official records.

Frequently drawing on avant-garde formal strategies, bringing together personal, social and cultural memories in a cinematic collage, Apichatpong's films recreate what Richard Dyer has called 'the texture of memory'.[310] Often using narrative techniques such as repetition, fragmentation, and convergence (as different threads of a narrative resonate uncannily both within and across the films), the work expresses what the *process of remembering* feels like – how the warp and weft of the past continuously moves through and shapes the present just as the present shapes our memories of the past.[311] In contrast to Thai heritage films such as Nonzee Nimibutr's *Nang Nak* (1999),[312] that present the past as relatively static, Apichatpong's work presents memory as a Bergsonian state of 'continuous becoming'.[313]

In telling these stories, therefore, the films present what curator Karen Newman has called an 'archive of experience', often drawing on the director's own intimate, and sometimes painful, memories of love and loss alongside broader concerns with 'cultural remembering' – particularly with the preservation of aspects of Thai cultural heritage and more broadly, cinematic heritage.[314] As Newman notes, his films act 'like time capsules, preserving memories and histories and asking us to remember'.[315] Demonstrating a deep concern with the interrelated themes of preservation and extinction, Apichatpong's work is a rich tapestry of storytelling traditions: folklore, *likay* folk theatre, soap opera, horror movies, adventure stories and even science fiction – all of which have, and continue to play, an important part

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[310] Richard Dyer, *Nino Rota: Music, Film and Feeling*, op. cit.

[311] As Andrew Hoskins contends, 'The *process* of remembering is not about retrieval…as there is no 'fixed' moment to recall. Rather, to form a memory requires a (re)construction of an event, person or place, which is ultimately contingent on (or rather, in) the present.' Andrew Hoskins, 'New Memory: Mediating History', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 21.4 (2001) p. 335.

[312] See May Adadol Ingawanij, '*Nang Nak*: Thai bourgeois heritage cinema', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 8.2 (2007), pp. 180 – 193.

[313] See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2004).

[314] Karen Newman, 'A Man Who Can Recall His Past Lives: Installations by Apichatpong Weerasethakul' in James Quandt (ed.), *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009), p. 143.

[315] Ibid.

in the formation of the Thai cultural imaginary. These frames of reference are broadened further as his work also demonstrates a number of Western influences including American structural and avant-garde filmmaking and European art cinema.[316] In this way, Apichatpong's films correspond with Susannah Radstone's description of the 'memory film' genre, as these films 'complicate the relations between personal and social memory, underlining the fact that memories are not simply 'ours' by drawing from and mediating a cultural memory bank of cinematic images and sounds'.[317] Like the films of the English director Terence Davies, which Radstone discusses, Apichatpong's work similarly 'remember[s] the past, in part by means of aural cinematic quotation, alluding not just to a history the films purport to share with their spectators, but to a commonly-held memory-store constituted by the films of the past'.[318]

As Annette Kuhn has described, the memory film has a distinct way of rendering cinematic temporality, often having a 'repetitive or cyclical quality' or fusing different events of recollections together in ways that are not necessarily logical in the conventional sense. As such, she argues, these films very often take the form of a montage of 'remembered events [that] seem to be outside any linear time frame or may refuse to be easily anchored to 'historical' time'.[319] These aspects of the genre are usually discussed in terms of the films' visual qualities. Radstone, for example, argues that often cinema's 'abiding fascination with memory expresses itself through relatively immobile camerawork, lengthy, photograph-like shots, and brief flashback sequences evocative of involuntary memory'.[320] Her words suggest that there is an intimate relationship between film form and what she calls the 'feel of memory's movements', as techniques such as the flashback mimic mnemonic processes as they seem to have the ability to connect the film's diegetic present with a remembered past triggered through the subjective thought processes of the film's

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[316]See May Adadol Ingawanij and Richard Lowell MacDonald, 'Blissfully Whose? Jungle Pleasures, Ultra-Modernist Cinema and the Cosmopolitan Thai Auteur', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 4.1 (2006), pp. 37 – 54.

[317] Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory' in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 328.

[318] Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory', op. cit., p. 328.

[319] Annette Kuhn, 'Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performance of Memory in and with Visual Media', *Memory Studies*, 3.4 (2010), p. 299.

[320] Susannah Radstone, 'Cinema and Memory', op. cit., p. 328.

protagonists.[321] While Apichatpong's films contain many of these visual features and formal devices, I argue that the sound design of the work also draws out the 'feel' or 'texture' of memory (personal, cultural and social). Firstly however, I want to demonstrate how Apichatpong's soundtracks, like those of Ghobadi and Jia's films, also foreground the politics of voice in memory discourses by discussing the significance of orality and storytelling in his films.

Memory, Voice and Storytelling

In her discussion of the 'memory text' in 'Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performance of Memory in and with Visual Media', Annette Kuhn contends that

> it is impossible to overstate the significance of narrative in cultural memory –
> in the sense not just of the (continuously negotiated) contents of
> shared/collective memory-stories, but also of the activity of recounting or
> telling memory-stories, in both private and public contexts – in other words,
> of performances of memory.[322]

For Kuhn, the genre presents memory as a *process* that is social and cultural as well as personal, performed in and through 'objects, material culture (monuments, books, and suchlike) as well as through practices and rituals of commemoration' that may involve, but are 'not confined to, what participants actually remember from their own experiences'.[323] These performances, she suggests, are always enabled through the narrativisation of memory – a theme that is central to Apichatpong's first feature length film, *Mysterious Object at Noon.*

The film, shot over three years during Thailand's economic crisis of the late 1990s, illustrates the performative and interrelated nature of cultural and social memory identified by both Kuhn and Radstone through its playful exploration of storytelling. The film is structured around a journey across the country from the north to the south and follows the surrealist method of the 'Exquisite Corpse',

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[321] Ibid. p. 328.
[322] Annette Kuhn, 'Memory Texts and Memory Work', op. cit., p. 299.
[323] Ibid., p. 298.

inviting people to contribute to a gradually unfurling narrative where each new unconnected speaker continues where the previous one left off. The film's Bakhtinian use of polyphonic storytelling foregrounds the voices of a range of regional identities, traversing different age groups, including children, teenagers, the middle aged and the elderly as narrators, with varying degrees of engagement and enthusiasm. The protagonists/storytellers advance the tale of 'Dogfahr and the Mysterious Object' in whichever direction they wish in direct-to-camera interviews. Beginning with a story about a teacher and a disabled child, and by the end involving a Witch-Tiger and an alien, the Dogfahr narrative changes from speaker to speaker and ranges from folklore to folk theatre, from soap opera melodrama to social realism, and eventually Manga-influenced science fiction. *Mysterious Object at Noon,* meanwhile, is itself a hybrid form of fictional road movie and experimental ethnographic documentary.

The opening moments of the film set up a complex, multi-layered narrative space that will be further explored and even pushed to extremes as the film unfolds, in which a multitude of different voices represent a dynamic heterotopia in constant transformation. As the film progresses, its mood changes as the narrative becomes secondary to the imaginative processes involved in the act of telling, and how the 'characters' in the film occupy and transform the spaces they inhabit through these processes. Fittingly, the film only comes to an end with the breakdown of the apparatus, meaning that the elusive narrative resolution of classical cinema is permanently withheld.

The layering of different voices in *Mysterious Object at Noon* emphasises plurality, creating a textured, interconnected discursive space that refuses the authority of a single voice or speaking position. As Sudarat Musikawong has remarked, this approach directly challenges conceptions of 'who has the right to tell the story' both in terms of the cinema and in relation to the Thai public sphere.[324] Yet, as Robert Stam notes, from a Bakhtinian perspective, 'A voice is never merely a

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[324] Sudarat Musikawong, 'Working Practices in Thai Independent Film Production', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 8.2 (2007), p. 255.

voice; it also relays a discourse'.[325] In this formulation, the voice (symbolically and literally) is *always already* embedded in a network of power relations, which by extension are also present in cultural texts. Bakhtin's term 'heteroglossia' describes a disruptive, centrifugal force that undercuts the idea of a unified, 'monologic' culture – a term, therefore, that can be readily applied to *Mysterious Object at Noon* and contemporary Thailand.[326] Written in the context of Stalinist Russia, his ideas continue to have relevance when discussing work produced in authoritarian regimes such as the films discussed in this thesis, in which dissenting voices are habitually made silent. As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson describe, heteroglossia is politically 'disruptive' (at least potentially) as it 'continually translates the minute alterations and re-evaluations of everyday life into new meanings and tones, which in sum, and over time, always threatens the wholeness of language'.[327] The inherent 'unruliness' or chaotic nature of these centrifugal forces however, means that they do not present a unified force against totalitarianism but offer rather a multitude of differing 'social voices' – what Bakhtin later calls 'speech genres'.[328]

Importantly, the sense of polyphony in *Mysterious Object at Noon* is foregrounded not just by the presence of so many narrators, or by the words that they say, but by *how* their voices are recorded, and the many non-verbal sounds and rhythms that their voices and the diegetic world of the film produce (capturing what Roland Barthes refers to as the 'grain of the voice').[329] Included in the final edit of

[325] Robert Stam, 'Bakhtin, Polyphony and Ethnic/Racial Representation', in Lester D. Friedman (ed.), *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 257.

[326] See Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' (1934-5) in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 263.

[327] Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 30.

[328] See Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau, Analysing Culture* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 123, and Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, translated by Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986). The politically disruptive potential of storytelling has also been discussed in the work of postmodernists, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel de Certeau who both link narrative to game playing. While the fact that *Mysterious Object at Noon* is based on the surrealist game 'Exquisite Corpse' connects the notion of storytelling and the game very literally, the tensions between different types of narratives that circulate in the Thai public sphere (in Lyotard's terms 'langue' and 'parole') are established at the very beginning of the film.

[329] In *Image, Music, Text*, Roland Barthes argues that the 'grain' of the voice is the materiality of 'the body speaking its mother tongue' thus Barthes's term is perhaps also appropriate to describe the material 'body' of the film in terms of the 'grain' of the sound. See Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1997), p. 183.

the film are a multitude of sighs, hesitations, repetitions, and overlaps (between different voices, sounds, and images, which are themselves drawn from multiple sources – diegetic, metafictional and archive footage). Just as the human voice stutters and stumbles and occasionally runs ahead of itself, so too the narration of the Dogfahr story is marked by the temporal instability of pauses, digressions and repetition. These aural aspects (in a similar way to the visual aspects of memory in film described by Radstone) mimic the ways in which memory is peppered with moments of forgetfulness and doubt as much as it can be trapped in a cycle of traumatic return. It is also in these gaps in speech, however, that the film itself becomes constantly and playfully re-opened as a space for renewal and invention, presenting a radical alternative to the linearity of state discourse – grounded in the undisciplined nature of memory.

Stories: Real or Fiction

The first narrator begins her story in the cramped space of the back of the fish van we see at the very beginning of the film. With her shoulders hunched over and her arms held closely to her body, she tells the filmmaker,

> I didn't know how to ride then, I always vomited. I had lived there for three months when my parents joined me. They said they couldn't stay because they could eat only sticky rice, not the steamed rice. So, they wanted to leave but they had no money. We were staying at my uncle's – I really respected him.

The woman's voice cracks with emotion as she describes how her father agreed to sell her to her uncle in exchange for the bus fare home. In a juxtaposition that James Quandt suggests 'insinuates a critique of patriarchal exploitation and neglect,' her monologue is set against the image of election posters featuring three smiling male politicians.[330] The disjuncture between the horror of what we hear of the woman's experience, and the dumb images of patriarchal power against which her testimony

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[330] James Quandt (ed.), *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009). p. 34.

are set, is signalled aurally by the irritating buzz of a mosquito heard at the top end of the soundtrack, heightening the strange tension between them. The interviewer then asks (as if to diffuse the potentially mawkish atmosphere), 'Now, do you have any other stories to tell us? It can be real or fiction'. The woman dries her eyes on the sleeve of her t-shirt and begins the story of 'Dogfahr and the Mysterious Object'.

Against the woman's narration on the soundtrack, the image cuts to a scene that depicts the visual representation of her words. In a stark aural as well as visual contrast to the fluid, handheld camerawork of the noisy street scene that preceded it, this quiet mise-en-abyme is filmed mostly in silence and in a subdued, static manner. An intertitle reads: 'What did you see in the outside world today?' A boy in a wheelchair speaks to his teacher, but while we see his lips move, we do not hear him speak. On the soundtrack meanwhile, we hear the fish vendor trading, and the laughter and chatter of his customers, as the image switches between the two worlds. The anachronistic layering of the silence of the metafictional world and use of intertitles, with the booming male voice of the film's diegesis, draws together storytelling conventions of silent cinema with those of an older, oral culture, in which stray ambient sounds inflect and shape the story-world. While at first the combination of these sources feels jarring, it also seems to articulate quite directly the way different sounds, voices and stories overlap, flow into, and give shape both to lived space and to memory.

The 'doubling' of space-time through the anachronistic layering of sound and image in this scene recalls Henri Bergson's description of the experience of time as duration – 'the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and…swells as it advances'.[331] For Bergson, 'There is no perception which is not full of memories'.[332] By this he means that the process of remembering involves the coexistence of multiple time frames at the moment of recollection. Bergson describes this as a temporal 'doubling', arguing that our experience of time 'is twofold at every moment, its very up-rush being in two jets exactly symmetrical, one of which falls back towards the past whilst the other springs forward towards the

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[331] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1998), p. 4.
[332] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, op. cit., p. 24.

future'.[333] For Bergson, then, all experience is characterised by this dualism: actual (perception) and virtual (memory). As I shall go on to discuss, Apichatpong's films frequently explore this sense of duality – particularly the 'splitting' of space-time through the de-synchronisation and layering of sound and image tracks. The films' attempt to convey the experience of perception relies less on the image, therefore, than on the interplay of sound and image, as well as through their affective use of sound.

As the audible prompting from the filmmaker in the scene described above suggests, storytelling is by definition a social act demanding an interaction between two parties – an exchange of memories and experiences between speaker and listener. This sense of reciprocality is foregrounded throughout *Mysterious Object at Noon* as the narrators frequently break off from their story to pause, as if waiting for a nod of reassurance or a verbal prompt from the (diegetic) listener/filmmaker. This sense of transference is partly created through the nature of sound itself, as sound theorist Steven Connor asserts:

> The dependence of sound upon the principles of resonance, transmission and induction implies the mutability and transparency of objects and bodies in space…Since transferral and transference are in the nature of sound, it also becomes the privileged figure of sensory interchange.[334]

Thus, oral storytelling can be understood as a process that privileges an exchange of embodied knowledge, articulating shared and personal memory, and as such plays a crucial role in mapping out social space. Significantly, then, not only is the story of 'Dogfahr' (and *Mysterious Object*) a collaborative piece; throughout the film the act of narration itself becomes a social event, as (diegetic) listeners around the principle narrator frequently interject and try to influence the story by adding elements or disagreeing with others. Reminiscent of Lyotard's description of the 'great joy' to be had 'in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings' in storytelling, one of the great pleasures of *Mysterious Object at Noon* is the

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[333] Henri Bergson, 'Memory of the Present and False Recognition', in Keith Ansell-Pearson and John Mullarkey (eds), *Henri Bergson: Key Writings* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), p. 145.
[334] Steven Connor, 'Sound and the Self' in *Hearing History: A Reader*, Mark M. Smith (ed.), (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), pp. 56 – 57.

spontaneity and unrehearsed 'disorderliness' of the contributors' speech as we hear and see their imagination taking hold of the narrative thread.[335] This act, or 'tactic' as de Certeau would describe it, destabilises the notion of an omniscient narrator traditionally associated with classical cinema – and by extension, the singular voice of autocratic or authoritarian regimes.

An example of this 'unruliness' occurs towards the end of the film, where a group of school children are gathered in a gym hall in their school. While the pleasurable shrieks and shouts and thuds of feet of the other children running around the gym hall merge with their voices, the group take the baton of the 'Dogfahr' story and the 'game' of storytelling continues when one boy shifts the narrative to a supernatural level involving a Witch Tiger and an alien. Although one boy in the centre of the group leads the narration, the other children around him whisper in his ear, nudge him, and verbally prompt him with their ideas. They also jostle for space around him, positioning themselves as both listeners and as part of the oratory group, even arguing at times when they feel that their position is being compromised or their view blocked. This complex relationship of producer, participant and consumer of knowledge as played out in this scene reinforces the dialogism of the film. At the same time, the children's laughter creates an anarchic aural space through its 'unruliness' and spontaneity that connects with Bakhtin's concept of the carnival – a space-time of creativity and of radical otherness in which exchange of knowledge flows unrestrained. As Stam writes, 'creative, derisive, renewing…laughter is profound [and] communitarian…a current passing from self to self'.[336] The sound of the children's laughter, then, is not only joyous but also 'infectious'. Just as Stam's words suggest, on witnessing this scene one cannot help but be drawn into the children's world – laughing with them while taking great pleasure in the uncertainty of where their imaginations will lead. Not only does this scene celebrate chaotic disorderliness as a release from 'monologic' authoritarianism, then, it also fosters a sense of intersubjectivity through the shared

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[335] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, op. cit.
[336] Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 119 – 120.

laughter of the protagonists and the audio-viewer – a theme that will be developed further in Apichatpong's later films and that I will return to later in the chapter.

Fragmented Histories

The 'unruliness' of the protagonists' speech and use of cultural or folk memory in the narrative also extends to the film's anachronistic use of sound alongside archive film footage and photographs. In one scene for example, after a sharp feedback squeal on the soundtrack (the sound of the 'real' bleeding into the space of the 'fictional'), the distorted acousmatic sound of a woman's voice (possibly the film's 'fictional' or 'real' production manager) is heard saying that she wants the next part of the Dogfahr story to be in flashback. Her voiceover explains (without indicating a particular time period) that in the story a woman and her son were on board a plane that was shot down on its arrival at a Cambodian airport during the war. The image then cuts to a series of still photographs of a young woman with a baby, and then to some (presumably fake) television footage of a family being interviewed on a chat show about the survival of the boy, followed by a montage of sun-bleached photographs of the crash scene. 'This is your Thai wife?' asks the chat show host. 'His mother is Chinese. The plane crashed in Cambodia, not Vietnam. We wonder…how this boy survived? Tell us from the beginning'.

The image flickers as if itself filmed off a television screen (indicating a temporal 'wavering'), and as the programme ends its soundtrack is heard in a further spatial-temporal leap across to the diegetic space of the Dogfahr story. Within this narrative space, Dogfahr tells the disabled child that her family 'fled the war to live in an Indian temple' as the image cuts to some documentary footage of an unnamed war-torn city under demolition in the aftermath of the Pacific War. Curiously, against these stark images, the soundtrack remains situated in the spatial-temporal location of Dogfahr's house – a rich, rural soundscape dominated by the soft, homely sounds of woodpigeons cooing and a crowing cockerel. The anachronistic juxtaposition of these historical images of destruction with these 'present-moment' sounds creates a jarring sense of temporal dislocation that fragments the 'meaning' of the images we

have witnessed and at the same time mimics the fragmentation and selective use of the past by authoritarian regimes.[337]

In an essay on Chris Marker's film *Level 5* (1997), Jonathan Kear argues that primary source historical documents such as archival film footage play a crucial role in historiographic accounts as this material, as

> both ground retrospective interpretations of the past in the historical context to which they refer, and assert the reliability, authenticity and authority of the narrative that is relayed to those past events. Such primary source documents, whether visual or verbal, serve as testimony to the 'real'.[338]

However, in this scene in *Mysterious Object at Noon*, the lack of cohesion between sound and image deliberately *disrupts* the notion of this material as authentic or having any intrinsic value as 'evidence'. Instead, woven as it is into the temporality of the (diegetic) present, it has an uncanny, melancholy resonance – although the images (certainly those of the Pacific War) are 'real', their lack of placement within a coherent narrative creates a dialectical 'gap' where meaning is lost. This kind of elliptical framework speaks directly of the silences that radical Thai historiographers, such as Thongchai Winichakul, argue pervade the dominant discourses about Thailand's 'misremembered' past.[339] It can also radically destabilise established 'truths' about the past however, as the disjuncture of sound and image disrupts the apparent seamlessness of dominant narratives. Like Walter Benjamin's use of allegorical juxtaposition in *The Arcades Project*, this 'unruly' use of sound and image can similarly '[rip] up the manifestly natural context of things, snapping open the apparent continuity of nature and history and prising apart space for reinterpretation and transformation'.[340] Indeed, the duality suggested here as a

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[337] The use of 'found' or archival footage in films often signals a desire to destabilise the perceived boundaries between memory and history. This can be seen in films as varied as Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror (Zerkalo*, 1975) and Wong Kar-wai's *In The Mood for Love* (*Fa yeung nin wa*, 2000) as well as in a number of mainstream 'memory boom' films, such as Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) and Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump* (1994).

[338] Jonathan Kear, 'A Game That Must Be Lost: Chris Marker Replays Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour'* in Francis Guerin and Roger Hallas (eds.), *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London: Wallflower, 2007), p. 134.

[339] See Thongchai Winichakul, 'Remembering/Silencing the Traumatic Past', op. cit.

[340] Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 199.

'prising apart' resonates with Bergson's temporal 'splitting' of memory and perception discussed earlier. Here, we perhaps get closer to the 'experience of history' which, like memory, is always fragmentary and disconnected.[341]

Affective Soundscapes

Drawing very directly on Apichatpong's own memories of love and loss following the death of his father and the break-down of a relationship, and weaving together various forms of popular Thai storytelling traditions, *Tropical Malady* (*Sud Pralad*, 2004), like *Mysterious Object* and *Blissfully Yours* (*Sud sanaeha*, 2002), foregrounds the memories and experiences of those on Thailand's social and political margins. Filmed on location in Petchburi and Khao Yai national park, *Tropical Malady* is made up of two separate but interrelated stories. The first is the portrayal of a romance between Tong, a young male villager, and an army patrol soldier named Keng, set in a bustling small town where they go on dates to the movies, a restaurant, and the market, and spend time together in the countryside around Tong's family home. Arnika Fuhrmann argues that, in contrast to mainstream Thai cinema that tends to represent homosexuality as a form of 'damage' (both socially and individually), the film 'pursues the strategy of re-anchoring homosexuality in the mundane, public, and collective aspects of life in Thailand, in an affectively shaped social environment'.[342] In my analysis of the film's sound design, I want to draw out this sense of affect to explore how this 'mundane, public, and collective' space depicted in the film can be understood as political. Annette Kuhn has described how the 'memory text' is 'characteristically collagist, fragmentary, timeless' and can 'call up, in words, or with the directness and apparent purity of sounds and images, a sense of what remembering feels like'.[343] For Kuhn, then, these works appeal directly to the audio-viewer's shared knowledge of *how we remember*, thus encouraging a

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[341] Ibid.

[342] Arnika Furhmann, 'Ghostly Desires: Sexual Subjectivity in Thai Cinema and Politics After 1997' (PhD diss., University of Chicago, Illinois, 2008), p. 217. See esp. Fuhrmann, '*Tropical Malady*: Homosexuality, Culture, and Economy in Thai Film and Politics After 1997', pp. 141 – 217.

[343] Annette Kuhn, 'A Journey Through Memory' in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 189.

sense of connection and intersubjectivity. *Tropical Malady*, I suggest, works in a similar way in that it uses sound to create a series of affective triggers that communicate quite directly (and at times, almost *viscerally*) the 'texture of memory'.

In recent years there has been a surge of interest in applying theories of affect to the study of film spectatorship. A key text in this respect, specifically with regards to the relationship between affect and memory in film, is Alison Landsberg's *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture.*[344] With the idea of prosthetic memory, Landsberg draws on Bergson's assertion in *Matter and Memory* that memory is not 'stored through visual images (as Freud had suggested) but as stored bodily actions, a physical trace of how the body acted under past stimulations'.[345] Like Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks, Landsberg argues that in contemporary culture, 'Memory remains a sensuous phenomenon experienced by the body…deri[ving] much of its power through affect'.[346] Taking this idea further, and suggesting that the cinema offers spectators from different backgrounds 'a shared archive of experience', Landsberg argues that the cinema might therefore 'be imagined as a site in which people experience a bodily, mimetic encounter with a past that was not actually theirs'.[347] Although I have reservations about how convincing I find Landsberg's overall argument, what interests me in particular here is the centrality of affect in her account of films' ability to articulate our shared experiences of how it feels to remember, and the way that affect might bring about a sense of intersubjectivity and thus encourage an ethical spectator. While in this chapter I will apply these ideas to Apichatpong's films, I hope that the reader will also be conscious of how they resonate across the thesis as a whole and have relevance also to the work of Bahman Ghobadi and Jia Zhangke.

Foregrounding a sense of intimacy (both through the narrative and through the films' use of sound), the scenes I turn to now share a somatic and emotional appeal that transcends, or perhaps rather *circumvents*, language – privileging instead, the epistemology of embodied memory. If the 'word games' of *Mysterious*

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[344] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, op. cit.
[345] Ibid., p. 16.
[346] Ibid., p. 8.
[347] Ibid., p. 14.

Object at Noon held the potential to destabilise the dominant construction of Thai society and culture as 'monological', this part of the chapter explores how the *de-privileging of language altogether* in the later films (effectively, a *negation* of 'la langue' of dominant discourse) continues these 'politics of memory', as symbolically the soundscape itself becomes, in Bakhtinian terms, a 'speech act'.[348]

Tropical Malady begins with a black screen and a distinct hissing sound like static on old film – a juxtaposition that again heightens our awareness of the materiality of the film (made on 35 mm) and immediately foregrounds a sense of tactility. Reminiscent of the opening of a silent film, an inter-title reads:

> "All of us by our nature are wild beasts. It is our duty as human beings to become like trainers who keep their animals in check and even teach them to perform tasks alien to their bestiality."
>
> – Ton Nakajima.[349]

Suddenly, with an abrupt cut to a group of soldiers in bright daylight, we see that the men have found the body of a man in the long grass on the outskirts of the jungle and are posing with the corpse for macabre group photographs.[350] Rather than using the convention of an establishing shot, beginning the film *in medias res* with an unstable, handheld camera momentarily *destabilises* the objectivity of the audio-viewer's position by creating a rush of sensory stimulation. This effect is heightened by the constant loud 'whssshhhh' sound of the wind through the long grass and the men's bodies brushing against it – tactile, 'natural' sounds that form a stark contrast with the high-pitched, 'artificial' electronic beeping from their walkie-talkies and the digital camera against which they are juxtaposed. The soundscape tells us that this is no pastoral idyll.

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[348] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, op. cit.

[349] As James Quandt has discussed, the contrasting moods of each half of the film are highlighted by the literary quotations shown as intertitles at the beginning of each. Although the film accredits the opening words to Ton Nakajima, Quandt points out that these words are actually from Japanese author Atsushi Nakajima (1909-1942). The second quote, appearing after the caesura at the film's mid-point, is from the Thai writer Noi Inthanon (1906-1963) (one of numerous pen names for the writer Marlai Choophinit). While the former was well known for his sophisticated style, the latter was 'celebrated for his regionalist fiction and his adventure stories about a hunter and his villager sidekick who venture into the Thai wild.' See James Quandt, 'Tropical Malady', op. cit., p. 64.

[350] Quite possibly Orn's lover, Tommy, who disappeared in *Blissfully Yours.* The only clue to his identity is the yellow underpants that he is wearing.

The kinetic sounds of the men's bodies in this constantly moving environment is captured by the microphone (recorded on-location at the time of filming) reaching our ears at what seems to be a slightly exaggerated level. The effect of this technique is to create a sense of immediacy or 'presentness' by heightening the phenomenological aspects of the scene, which is further emphasised by the close-perspective recording, which captures in rich detail the materiality of the diegetic sounds, such as those that convey the stiff, man-made texture and cumbersome weight of the tarpaulin (used to make a stretcher for the body) as the men drag it through the grass. The use of sound in this very *textured* way in this opening scene, by focussing on sound's materiality, establishes a pattern that will recur throughout the film in terms of the way it uses sound not simply to convey information, but to create a sense of rhythm and temporality, as well as a sense of intimacy between the film and the audio-viewer. As the film cuts to an extreme long shot of the soldiers walking through the field, the sound of the wind continues to dominate the soundtrack while the image works in synchrony to capture the soft, undulating rhythms of the grass as the wind blows over it. Illustrating what Michel Chion terms 'visual microrhythms', which he describes as 'movements on the image's surface …[which] create rapid and fluid rhythmic values, instilling a vibrating, trembling temporality in the image itself …[affirming]…a kind of time property to sound cinema as a recording of the microstructure of the present', in this moment, narrative is momentarily suspended, as the aural and visual rhythms of the environment become the focus of the audio-viewer's attention.[351] Through the synchronicity of sound and image, it is as though time itself has been paused to allow the spectator to contemplate the multiple, vibrating energies of the present moment creating a sense of Bergson's memory-time that draws together the different time frames of perception and recollection in a single instant.

A further layer to the 'texture' of the sound in this opening scene is added as a heavily distorted female voice transmitted through the walkie-talkie cuts through the wind: 'Forest fire on M. O. 12. Copy, over'. As one of the soldiers begins to flirt with her across the airwaves, their dialogue mimics a kind of hammy soap opera

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[351] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, translated by Claudia Gorbman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 17.

script, only eerily accented by sonic distortion and static electricity making their voices resonate uncannily around the field:

> 'Pretty Patcharee all alone. Do you need a friend?'
> 'I have lots of friends but my heart is still free.' (The soldiers respond humorously with smiles and camp 'oooohs!')
> 'Then I'll stop by. Don't be a stranger.'
> 'Is that Sawang? I've only heard your voice. I've never met you in person.'
> 'I'm at M.O.4. I hope my voice can soothe your heart. Can you sing us a song?'

As the soldiers walk away from a fixed camera towards the jungle, their voices begin to fade, becoming almost indistinguishable from the sound of the wind. Like the characters, the audio-viewer struggles to catch the words:

> 'What? There's too much static – I can't hear you very well.'
> 'That's static from my heart. It's calling out to you…Can I request a song?'
> 'Your battery might run out. I'll request a song from the radio. Is there a signal out there? …This is for all you lonely guys. You're hot and wild like a forest fire.'

At this, the compressed sound of a hip-hop drum-fill (the intro of the film's theme song, 'Straight' by Thai band *Fashion Show*) is heard on the soldiers' radio. As the low-angled camera dollies forward through the grass (like a predatory animal silently lurching forward to stalk its prey), the sound becomes louder, gaining resonance as it switches from diegetic to non-diegetic. When the soft, male vocals and lush guitar chords of the song's verse come in (echoing the sensuous sonic qualities of the wind through the grass), the image cuts to a long shot where the naked figure of a man crosses the frame from left to right, glancing briefly towards the direction of the now static camera. The figure then leaves the frame as the song's middle eight draws into focus an electronic arpeggio of melodic blips and bleeps that echo the soldiers' communication devices. As these sounds merge with the diegetic, ambient sound of crickets, the screen fades up to a mid shot of Keng looking directly into the camera

lens as he watches Tong's mother prepare a meal for her family and his patrol the night he and Tong first meet.[352]

The sound design in this first part of the film provides a building, pulse-like rhythm through a series of scenes shot in the style of observational documentary using on-location sound recording in which the materiality of the soundscape is foregrounded and environmental sounds are given equal weight to dialogue. As Benedict Anderson has noted, in the first part of the film,

> there is no background music at all: instead the sounds of everyday country life, motorbikes, dogs barking, small machines working, and so on. The mostly banal conversations are also essentially 'background', and one does not need to pay careful attention to their content. Foregrounded are faces, expressions, body-language, silent communication with eyes and smiling lips. The elderly woman whom Tong calls Mae [mum] shows by her expression that she understands the courtship going on, but she says nothing about it, nor does anyone else in the village.[353]

The soundscape moves from the hum of motorbikes and beeping car horns in the bustling street scenes, to the industrial sounds of percussive hissing and chipping, and the frenzied mechanical whirring of the machinery at the ice factory where Tong works. It then moves to a basketball game where he relaxes with his work-mates, to another noisy street scene, and then back to Tong's work. Sound designer, Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr's organisation of these sound sequences and their building rhythm endows them with an almost musical quality reminiscent of experimental avant-garde music produced in the 1950s and 60s composed of single or multi-tracked field recordings.[354] This highly affective, multi-layered sound design, incorporating the extremes of ambient sound and street rhythm, articulates a sense of the developing relationship between the two men in place of dialogue.

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[352] The temporality of this opening scene seems to be deliberately confusing as the presence of the naked body of Tong roaming through the fields is followed shortly after by a shot of him casually walking home through the same fields fully dressed. The presence of the pop song therefore seems to create a plane of experience that exists in parallel to that which is signalled by the diegetic ambient sounds of the natural world evoking a sense of multiple temporalities.

[353] Benedict Anderson, 'The Strange Story of a Strange Beast: Receptions in Thailand of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Sat Pralat*' in James Quandt (ed.), *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009), p. 161.

[354] Such as that composed by Steve Reich and John Cage.

The sounds and street rhythms reach a crescendo (literally, but also dramatically) in a scene that takes place in the rural outskirts of the town, after Keng has been trying to teach Tong to drive so he can get more work. In a sudden heavy downpour, they run for cover underneath a sala (a wooden structure in the forest). Although the volume of the torrential rain on the soundtrack in this scene is extremely loud, at first their dialogue is just audible: 'I'm soaked,' Tong says. 'Are you cold?' Keng asks him, before handing him a gift that he has brought him (a copy of a cassette by Thai pop band, *Clash*). In turn, Tong passes him a photograph from his wallet of himself when he was a soldier stationed at Kanchanaburi. Keng lies back and says, 'Ah, a soldier has a lonely heart'. Tong adds, 'You never die a natural death', to which Keng replies, 'I'd hate to die without having loved', gazing at the photograph. When Keng asks Tong who the other man is in the photograph, the camera draws back and films the scene in long shot. As the camera's position changes, so too does the point-of-audition which, in synchrony with the image, retreats to some distance away, resulting in the dialogue being almost completely drowned out by the sound of the rain. The withdrawal of the microphone from the intimate space between them creates a narrative ellipsis – we do not find out who the figure was, and perhaps neither does Keng.

While sound design in classical cinema often privileges the voice, lowering ambient sound in order to ensure intelligibility while creating an illusion of naturalism, in this scene, as elsewhere in Apichatpong's work, 'natural' ambient or environmental sounds are heightened to the extent that they become almost *denaturalized*, thus heightening their affective power. In the scene described above, the sound of the rain is so dominant that it dismantles our reliance on the verbal or the linguistic to ground our understanding of what is happening, and instead encourages (or rather *insists* upon) an embodied, phenomenological, engagement with the sensuality of the scene.[355] This use of sound and textual synaesthesia foregrounds sound's materialism and its relationship to touch, sight, and taste, creating a feeling of sensory immersion on the part of the spectator where the senses seem to become indistinct. At the same time, this heightened use of sound

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[355] While the presence of subtitles for non-Thai speakers complicates this argument, I would maintain that the general *feel* of the scene in terms of sensory impression remains the same.

performs a narrative function, expressing the unspoken erotic dimension to Keng and Tong's relationship.

The sense of temporal suspension witnessed at the beginning of the film in the field by the forest occurs again later on, in a scene that signals the transition between two parts of the film and similarly depends on affect to communicate meaning. Standing in a deserted street at night after their date at the cinema (significantly, beneath Thailand's national flag and a yellow flag with royal or Buddhist insignia), Tong voraciously licks Keng's hand and fingers before disappearing into the darkness leaving Keng standing alone in stunned silence.[356] On the soundtrack, the soft electronic arpeggios from the middle section of the film's theme song are heard again, this time acting as a bridge between the film's two halves as Keng drives through the night on his motorbike back to his base.

Long takes like this from the viewpoint of moving vehicles are a recurrent visual motif in Apichatpong's work that convey a sense of temporal suspension while recreating a floating, dream-like state.[357] In all of these scenes, the effect is underscored by the use of sound. In *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, Chion argues that

> suspension occurs when a sound naturally expected from a situation…becomes suppressed, either insidiously or suddenly. This creates an impression of emptiness or mystery, most often without the spectator knowing it; the spectator feels its effect but does not consciously pinpoint its origin.[358]

Although the technique still 'generates strangeness', the effect is quite different when this void is filled by non-diegetic sound, as it is in this scene in *Tropical Malady*. Carole Piechota has discussed similar occasions in recent American films where a pop song dominates the soundtrack for the duration of the sequence. In these scenes, she argues, the affective power of the music is such that the cinematography

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[356] See Fuhrmann, op. cit. p. 143, for a fuller discussion of the significance of this mise-en-scène in relation to sexuality and the political climate in Thailand.

[357] Apichatpong discusses this in an interview with Holger Römers. See Holger Römers 'Creating His Own Language: An Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul', *Cineaste*, 30.4 (Fall 2005), pp. 42 – 47. See also May Adadol Ingawanij and Richard Lowell MacDonald, 'Blissfully Whose? Jungle Pleasures, Ultra-Modernist Cinema and the Cosmopolitan Thai Auteur' op. cit.

[358] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* op. cit., p. 132.

becomes subordinate to the rhythm of the song, which momentarily controls the film's temporal register. In these moments, dramatic time is suspended, creating what she calls an 'audiovisual passage'. According to Piechota, these 'passages' elicit an affective response from the audio-viewer where the music is not simply an expression of the character's mood or character, but rather seems to *transcend* the diegetic framework altogether, moving the spectator accordingly. As she argues, 'As these passages frequently last for several minutes (often the length of a pop song) and either lack or downplay dialogue, the perceiver is left with more time to acknowledge or contemplate her bodily and affective experiences'.[359]

As well as encouraging an affective response from the audio-viewer, this use of sound also conveys Keng's subjective perception of the world in his state of heightened emotion, the combination of these two effects of the sound perhaps enabling a sense of the intersubjective. As he rides through the town, for roughly a minute and a half, the nondiegetic pop song that plays over this scene seems to simulate Keng's state of bliss and suggests that he is oblivious to events going on around him. This mood is suggested sonically as the music obliterates all diegetic sound – even as he passes the market place (which we remember from his date with Tong earlier as a vibrant, bustling and noisy place), the diegetic sound is completely, and surreally, absent. The song also effaces a temporal elision, providing a non-narrative bridge to the following morning when we see shots of Keng and his troupe being driven to their new placement. This transitional use of sound provides psychological insight as it suggests that Keng is still exhilarated from the previous night's erotic strangeness. The mise-en-scène indicates however that this rapturous state will be short lived, as with a cut to the view from the back of the truck we see the dust rising up from the road billowing out into their wake – a juxtaposition of sound and image that evokes not bliss, but its transience.

Crucially, although this sequence is concerned primarily with feeling and pleasure, it also provides an example of what David Teh has termed the 'camouflage politics' of Apichatpong's work, as it (seemingly almost incidentally) draws attention

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[359] Carole Piechota, 'Touching Sounds: The Audiovisual Passage in Contemporary Cinema', unpublished PhD (Wayne State University) cited by Steven Shaviro, 'Postcinematic Affect', *Film-Philosophy Journal*, 14.1 (2010), p. 85.

to the social dissonance and violence that this bliss-state might conceal.[360] For example, when Keng passes the marketplace, he rides past a small group of men brutally kicking a man in the stomach as he lies on the floor, and then run after the bike (where the camera is positioned) hurling bricks – yet this is apparently unnoticed by Keng.[361] The affective power of the pop song played over this sequence, with its swirling, major-chord melodies, creates a spectatorial experience very like Piechota's 'audiovisual-passage' by lulling the audio-viewer into a similar dream-like, blissful reverie. However, this jarring, anempathetic juxtaposition of sound and image jolts us out of this state as if to alert us to the pervasive threat of violence in Keng and Tong's world (and by extension, the presence of the flags suggests, the nation-state of Thailand) – a fear temporally 'anaesthetised' by transient pleasure.[362]

The Trauma of Forgetting

While *Tropical Malady* deals mainly with personal memory, Apichatpong's fifth feature film, *Syndromes and a Century* (*Sang Sattawat,* 2006), blurs the boundaries of personal and social memories by connecting his family's story with that of a wider socio-political framework.[363] The film is centrally concerned with the preservation of memory following the death of his father, and is based on Apichatpong's recollections of the stories told to him by his parents about their time working as doctors in a hospital before they were married. Their interrelated memories form the film's two halves (firstly from the perspective of a female doctor based on Apichatpong's mother, named Toey, and secondly an army trained doctor based on

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[360] David Teh, 'On Sovereign Framing: Parergon in Southeast Asian Film and Video', conference paper presented at the 6th Association of Southeast Asian Cinemas Conference, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 1-4th July 2010.

[361] In interviews, Apichatpong has deliberately remained quiet about whether this scene was staged or not, although most readings of the film assume that it was.

[362] For a fuller discussion of an 'anaesthetised' public sphere see Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with Benedict Anderson and David Teh (translated by May Adadol Ingawanij), *The More Things Change* (Bangkok: Project 304 / Kick the Machine, 2008), p. 42.

[363] The Thai title meaning 'Light of the Century'. Like Ghobadi's *Half Moon*, the film was commissioned by Vienna's New Crowned Hope festival to mark the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth.

his father, called Nohng). As such, each half of the film resonates with feint traces and uncanny reflections of its double, as Apichatpong's recollections of his parents' memories form an elliptical and enigmatic narrative involving flashbacks and circular repetitions – formal devices characteristic of the 'memory films' described by Kuhn and Radstone discussed earlier. As Kong Rithdee notes, 'the elusive nature of what is inherited and what is actually remembered constitutes the enigma of *Syndromes and a Century*, a film in which time is fragmented and memories compartmentalised'.[364]

Like Apichatpong's earlier films, the use of structural bifurcation in *Syndromes and a Century* brings about a series of 'doubles', foregrounding a sense of multiple-temporalities that destabilises dominant conceptions of time as linear, as well as creating a sense of multiple perspectives that, like *Mysterious Object at Noon*, challenges the conception of a singular authoritative voice. As Jihoon Kim notes, the parallels and repetitions that occur between the two halves of the film form a cyclical pattern reminiscent of the effect of video looping in multi-screen video art which 'organize[s] the spatial arrangement and distribution of various temporal modalities – simultaneity, ellipsis, comparison, leaps into the future, the disparity between past and present, contestations between different viewpoints on a single event, and so forth'.[365] Both halves of the film take place in hospitals: firstly, a small country hospital in Khon Kaen; and secondly, a large modern hospital in Bangkok. Hospitals and medical centres are a recurrent trope in Apichatpong's work and connote both physical and psychological healing. The English title of the film, *Syndromes and a Century*, however, extends this theme to a broader socio-historical framework, as Apichatpong's intimate family memories are made to resonate with those of the Thai nation: 'Everyone is a relative', we are told. While the first part of the film is dialogue-led and characterised by natural light, lush green plant life, and the natural, environmental sounds of its rural setting, the second, by contrast, features mostly artificial, fluorescent lighting, significantly less dialogue and a highly

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[364] Kong Rithdee, 'Cinema of Impermanence' *Criticine* posted 09.08.07
http://www.criticine.com/review_article.php?id=24 [accessed 10.3.08]
[365] Jihoon Kim, 'Between Auditorium and Gallery', op cit., p. 135.

affective electroacoustic score by avant-garde composers Koichi Shimizu and Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr.

In an interview with Kong Rithdee, Apichatpong explains that the sound design for *Syndromes and a Century* was planned at the time of filming and was intended to communicate with the audio-viewer on a visceral level:

> While filming at the hospital, the sound of construction pounded in my heart. Ideas for sound design developed in this way. And during editing, there were sound effects that I wanted to experiment with…I wanted [the sound to] resonate in the heart. I didn't want it to sound like a score or to have a clear melody, but to blend into the film's ambience. For the viewer to be aware of sound design but not be overly conscious - I tried to tune it to the same frequency as the viewer, to their heartbeat or their blood pumping so the sound is naturally absorbed into their body.[366]

The sense of synchronicity between the film's score and the body of the audio-viewer that Apichatpong describes here highlights the sense of bodily connection and sensory exchange that has been implicit in my analysis of his work thus far. It infers a sense of mutuality (symbolically, a dialogic and discursive space) that again draws on the epistemology of embodied memory – a shared sense of how it feels to remember that is grounded in the senses. The insistent materiality of the film score (reminiscent of musique concrète) connects with, and extends, several of the traits found in the earlier films' sound design in terms of the relationship between sound and phenomenology. The sound design towards the end of *Syndromes and a Century* becomes even more abstract as heightened diegetic sounds merge with the electroacoustic score – drawing out a symbolic connection between 'broken' bodies and a 'broken' state.

This symbolic shift occurs during a long sequence that begins with Nohng meeting a colleague who shows him around the hospital. When they go down the stairs to the basement (a hidden, subterranean space), he explains to Nohng, 'the basement is reserved for military patients, war veterans and their relatives'. 'Everyone is a relative', Nohng answers. 'I know, small country huh?' he laughs. The film cuts to a workshop in one of the basement rooms where prosthetic limbs are

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[366] Apichatpong Weerasethakul interview with Kong Rithdee, *Syndromes and A Century* (DVD, BFI, 2008).

being made and tried on by amputee patients. The mood changes abruptly as a disk drill whirs maniacally against the oppressive electric hum of the fluorescent strip lights above. A low, nondiegetic electronic drone slowly builds in resonance as if seeping beneath these diegetic sounds like blood. This sense of malevolence is underscored by the sound of rhythmic banging as the camera tracks slowly along the hospital corridor. Composed of multiple layers of industrial and electronic sound, enhanced by the use of reverb and delay, the tone of the soundscape here is both extremely melancholy and, at times, menacing, with the addition of a rhythmic electronic pulse that mimics the sound of a racing heart.[367] With the absence of dialogue in this sequence in *Syndromes and a Century*, the affective power of the sound design communicates *through our bodies* a sense of pain occurring on a national level ('everyone is a relative') that is unspeakable within the Thai public domain.

In the final moments of the film, the unnerving sounds of the basement fade as the melodic voice of a woman singing outside accompanies a visual cut to the lake by the hospital. Nearby some people are waltzing – oblivious to the horror we have just witnessed in the basement. This sound is then overridden by a man's voice on a nearby radio. As the camera scans the scene, we see a large crowd doing aerobics to an upbeat pop song (the sound of jouissance in Apichatpong's films) and some monks playing nearby with a toy UFO. Ending in this way, the film seems to suggest that beneath the surface of these everyday pleasures lies a darker, unspoken element of Thai public life. Symbolically, this juxtaposition provides a sense of a wider, cultural amnesia that crosses generations – a theme that becomes central to Apichatpong's most recent work, *Primitive* (2009-2010).

In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsh theorises the process of generational memory as 'postmemory' – where the children of trauma survivors feel a strong connection with a past that they themselves did not experience. As she writes, 'Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated

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[367] This technique is reminiscent of the affective 'heartbeat' sounds discussed by Ben Winters as characteristic of the horror genre and that are specifically intended to have an effect on the audio-viewer's body. See Ben Winters, 'Corporeality, Musical Heartbeats, and Cinematic Emotion', op. cit.

stories are displaced by the stories of a previous generation'.[368] For Hirsch, postmemory is a 'space of remembrance, more broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance, identification, and projection'.[369] Postmemory is hugely important for those cultures where it is felt that remembrance is ethically, politically and emotionally necessary for healing to take place. Yet, what about when traumatic memories are not passed on to younger generations because of the desire to forget a deeply painful past, or where, what Paul Connerton terms, a 'repressive erasure' takes place?[370]

In *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins explores the latter in more detail. Although describing Western democracies, her argument also has important significance for understanding the politics of forgetting in authoritarian states such as those discussed in this thesis. For Edkins, '[w]hat we call politics takes place in the smooth, homogenous linear time of narrative forms with origins and end points. It takes place in the context of the nation-state, an imaginary community of people with a shared history and culture and shared values or goals'.[371] While memory and commemoration, she argues, play a vital role in maintaining this, forgetting is equally important, as

> for 'politics' to take place, the way in which the current political structures came into being must be overlooked. These structures must appear to have come down from time immemorial – not to have been born out of the traumatic violence of revolutions or wars. They must appear to have firm foundations – not to have been established by a coup de force, itself an unfounded, but founding, moment.[372]

Thus, because the disruptive temporality of trauma destabilises 'the smooth time of the imagined or symbolic story', traumatic memories of state oppression must be

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[368] Marianne Hirsch, 'Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy' in Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds.), *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover and London: Dartmouth College and University Press of New England, 1999), p. 8.
[369] Ibid., pp. 6 – 7.
[370] See Paul Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting', *Memory Studies*, 1.1 (January, 2008), p. 60.
[371] Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 229.
[372] ibid.

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disavowed in order to ensure that 'the sovereign power of the modern state is to remain unchallenged'.[373]

Primitive, Apichatpong's first multi-platform project, draws out the connection between personal and public memory made in *Syndromes and a Century* more directly, offering a counter-discourse to the state's 'repressive erasure' by 'giving voice' to the experiences and memories of victims of historical trauma who have chosen to forget. Exhibited at Liverpool's FACT gallery in the autumn of 2009,[374] the project consists of seven videos shown simultaneously in the gallery space, including *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2009) and the music video 'I'm Still Breathing' for the Thai band, *Modern Dog*, and continues the themes of preservation, transformation and extinction found in the earlier work. Also included are the online video *Phantoms of Nabua*, an artist's book, and the recent Palme d'Or winner, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (*Loong Boonmee raleuk chat*, 2010).

The project grew out of Apichatpong's two-month research stay in the village of Nabua in the province of Nakhon Phanon in the rural Isan region of northeast Thailand, close to the Laos border. Occupied by the military from the 1960s to the early 1980s to quell the threat of communist insurgency, this is a site of profound historical trauma and suppressed memory.[375] During this period, the villagers (who were mainly uneducated farmers) experienced extreme violence and oppression at the hands of their government. On the morning of August 7th 1965, some of the locals retaliated, resulting in a gun battle in the rice fields. Unsurprisingly, fighting against considerable force, the locals were defeated and as a result went on to suffer further brutality; many fled into the jungle to seek refuge, leaving mainly women and children behind. While the army remained for a further two decades, after the end of the Cold War, the government offered financial incentives and land in exchange for weapons, and the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) eventually faded.

As Kong Rithdee has described, the installation alludes to this time as 'part of a

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[373] ibid.

[374] See http://www.fact.tv/videos/watch/736 [accessed 1.3.11]

[375] See Benedict Anderson, 'Radicalism after Communism in Thailand and Indonesia', *New Left Review*, 202 (November – December, 1993), pp. 3 – 14. See also Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: the Politics of Despotic Paternalism* (2nd ed.) (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2007) for an extensive account of this era and the political instability experienced by the Isan region.

bitter memory – the past lives that nobody wants to recall in full voice'.[376] This private desire to forget has been matched in public, official discourse by the continual downplaying of the state's brutality, resulting in a kind of national amnesia. According to Apichatpong, Nabua has thus experienced a 'double trauma' – that of the initial brutality and oppression, followed later by the trauma of 'not knowing' – a kind of empty or absent space experienced by the male teenagers of the village who become the central protagonists of the installation.[377]

Slavoj Žižek argues 'the essence of the trauma is precisely that it is too horrible to be remembered, to be integrated into our symbolic universe'.[378] Following this logic, it would seem that part of the reason for the silence around Nabua (as well, perhaps, as a degree of guilt over complicity – suggested later in the feature film), is that the barbarity of these acts of state violence is historically *incomprehensible* within the dominant Thai historiographic discourse, in which a rhetoric of paternalism represents the state and the monarchy as benevolent protectors of the people against *external* threats.[379] The amnesty of the early eighties was, in the main, successful, because the public desire to forget – to bring about healing and reconciliation – was met with the political will to reinstate the benign image of the country's leadership. Although Sarit was remembered in official discourse as a great leader, the treatment of ordinary Thais under his authoritarian regime, along with revelations of corruption that emerged following his death, led to a questioning in some circles of this dominant nationalist narrative.[380]

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[376] Kong Rithdee, 'Of Monkey Ghosts and Men', *Bangkok Post* [posted 28.05.10] http://www.bangkokpost.com/entertainment/music/37872/of-monkey-ghosts-and-men [accessed 29.05.10]

[377] Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Primitive/ Haus der Kunst, Munich/ Interview [13.04.09] http://vernissage.tv/blog/2009/04/13/apichatpong-weerasethakul-%E2%80%93-primitive-haus-der-kunst-munich-interview/ [accessed 25.10.09]

[378] Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 272 – 3.

[379] As historian Thak Chaloemtiarana describes in public speeches General Sarit Thanarat (Prime Minister between 1959 and 1963) would often refer to the country as a family, of which he was the father. See Thak Chaloemtiarana, *Thailand: the Politics of Despotic Paternalism* op. cit., p. 106.

[380]This ambivalence towards his memory is vividly expressed in an anecdote described by Thak, about his recent visit to the Sarit memorial in Apichatpong's hometown Khon Kaen where he found it to have been vandalised by graffiti (ibid., p. 252). In an interview with Brian Curtin, Apichatpong explains that this statue, Sarit's ambiguous legacy, and why Thais seem to so readily forget historical injustices, were a major inspiration for the Primitive Project. See Apichatpong Weerasethakul interview with Brian Curtin [posted 1.7.10], http://www.art-it.asia/u/ab_brianc?lang=en [accessed 12.7.10]

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the process of forgetting past injustices is one with powerful repercussions for the politics of the present. For trauma theorist Maureen Turim, however, this act of forgetting is a strategy that trauma victims often deploy, distancing themselves from their own memories and those of others in order to minimise the pain of remembering. Work that attempts to rearticulate these suppressed memories, she suggests, has the potential to reposition these marginalised narratives within the dominant discourse:

> [T]he individual and collective elements of trauma are often interwoven and inextricable. When one is a member of a traumatized collectivity, what has happened to others like one's self has the potential to multiply the wounds. Ironically, one of the effects of trauma is to distance the self not only from one's memory, but also from the experience of others, and from any collective formation. In many ways then the works that attempt to represent trauma become a call for attention, for an end to isolation, and for a meaningful return of historical memory.[381]

Echoing *Primitive*'s concern with the cyclical nature of political violence and injustice in Thailand, and the role played by suppressed memory in the continuation of this process, Turim asks, 'How does working through past traumas set up the possibility of recognition of traumatic implications of the present?'[382] This question has strong resonance in the Primitive Project, particularly in light of the violence experienced by Red Shirt protestors in Bangkok in 2010 at the hands of the state, and has vital significance for a Derridean reading of film texts that deal with the problematic relationship between memory and official history.

Silent Pasts

In *Primitive*, the 'unspeakable' nature of these traumatic events is not given shape through dramatic re-enactment or flashback, but formally, through the articulation of space-time as 'vibrating' with 'other' histories and ambivalent memories that

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[381] Maureen Turim, 'The Trauma of History: Flashbacks upon Flashbacks', *Screen,* 42.2 (Summer 2001), p. 210.
[382] Ibid., p. 207.

disturbs the conception of space-time as homogenous or empty.[383] This effect is achieved through the interplay of absence and presence both sonically and visually. Incorporating both animist and modernist aesthetics, the *Primitive* project creates what might be termed a 'hybrid hauntology' that explores this ethical dynamic of remembering and forgetting through looping, repetition, and the ghost figure, transforming the work into audio-visual palimpsests in which space-time is not experienced as inert, but as composed of multiple energies and temporalities.[384]

The short film *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* begins with a shot through a window of trees swaying in the breeze, a view partly obscured by a venetian blind and some clothing hanging up to the left of the frame. The distinctly rural sounds of insects and birds chirping in the trees and, shortly later, a cockerel crowing, dominate the soundscape. Slowly, the camera tracks backwards and pans round to reveal the interior space of a deserted rural house. A young, male, acousmatic voice begins to read from a letter, a rehearsal of Apichatpong's own private letter to Boonmee who died several years before:

> Uncle, I have been here for a while. I want to see a movie about your life, so I proposed a project about your reincarnations. In my script, your house is a longan farm surrounded by mountains but there are endless planes and rice fields here. Last week, I met a man I thought was your son. He works at the auto garage, but after talking to him, I thought he was your nephew because his father was a policeman who owned hundreds of cows. Judging by your book, I don't think you owned a lot of cows. And you were a teacher weren't you? The man was old, he couldn't remember his father's name very well – might have been Boonmee or Boonma. He said it was a long time ago. Here in Nabua, there are several houses well suited for this short film for which I got funding from England. I don't know what your house looked like; I can't use the one in my script since they are so different here. Maybe some parts of these houses will resemble yours.

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[383] See Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 231 – 45.

[384] Hayden White argues that modernism's anti-narrative techniques (such as those displayed by Apichatpong in the Primitive Project) provide a way of representing traumatic historical experiences without 'fetishising' these memories and thus reducing their emotional and psychological seriousness by attempting to depict the horror experienced 'realistically'. 'This de-fetishising', he suggests, 'can then clear the way for that process of mourning which alone can relieve the 'burden of history' and make a more, if not totally, realistic perception of current problems possible.' See Hayden White, 'The Modernist Event' in Vivian Sobchack (ed.), *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 32

With a measured, flowing movement, the camera explores the architectural detail of the house as it moves around the space from room to room, revealing a quite ordinary mise-en-scène that marks this as a family home – ordinary, except for the absence of people and the silence. A banal, seemingly arbitrary collection of everyday objects – empty beds, unworn jackets on hooks, an idle television set, some framed family portraits and a calendar on the wall – are all patiently observed as the voice reads out the letter. Another, smaller photograph (not fully brought into focus) is briefly glimpsed – it shows two soldiers posing solemnly with their weapons, this single image the only evidence of the violence of Nabua's past.[385]

In this film, a Bergsonian sense of the 'plurality of space' is created through the disjunctive layering of sound and image.[386] As the camera continues to move across the framed photographs, before cutting to the interior of another deserted house nearby, the letter to Boonmee begins again, this time read by another young, male acousmatic voice. In contrast to the first house, this interior is barely visible, as the light of the outside world seen through a series of open wooden shutters casts the inside space into silhouette, highlighting the stark contrast between the movement and sounds of the trees outside in the wind, and the stillness and silence of the interior space. Almost identical to the first version of the letter, this reading ends with a slight variance – a query into what Boonmee's view might have been like. At this point, the camera tracks forward to an open window, and the trees outside fill the frame as a storm begins to build. The stillness of the interior mise-en-scène is contrasted against the almost constant movement of the trees and the camera that seems to glide ethereally around the space, as if the embodiment of a spectral figure. With a sudden upward shift in volume, the rushing sound of the wind through the trees starts to intensify, a door creaks, and the birdsong that had dominated the beginning of the film fades while the late afternoon sun disappears behind the treetops. As these diegetic, environmental sounds build to a crescendo, the film cuts to a mid-shot of a soldier sitting on a window ledge casually eating, while looking out over the yard as trees sway violently in the wind.

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[385] It is fitting that this gesture to the past is passed without comment, or indeed any sound that might draw its significance to the forefront of our thoughts. It gestures towards the silence in Thai public discourse around the country's troubled history of coups, totalitarianism and state brutality.
[386] Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time*, op. cit., p. 39.

The sense of a spectral presence created by the camera movement is further underscored visually with a cut to an interior shot of a bed shrouded in a pink mosquito net, the outline of a still, corpse-like frame barely visible through the mesh. Juxtaposed against this image, the sound of hoes tapping against hard ground can be heard from outside the window, along with the soft, low acousmatic voices of a group of young male soldiers and the omnipresent, ambient sounds of birds, insects, and the cockerel. The camera slowly tracks across to an open window to reveal the source of the sound – a group of soldiers are trying to break up the soil in the yard below. As the image of the tomb-like bed makes the sleeping soldier appear like a corpse, the overlaying sounds from soldiers digging outside suggest a gruesome archaeological excavation, as if the men are there to exhume the region's secrets or perhaps the bodies of its dead.

More hesitantly now, the letter begins again, this time read by two voices, leading to much more disjointed speech as one of the teenagers seems to struggle over some of the script:

'I…I…'
'Is that right or not?'
'He is your nephew.'
'But after talking to him…'
'How do you say 'view'?'
''View' is 'view'.'
'Must be uncle's house.'

The ellipses in the speech, as unfinished sentences hang in the air and thoughts flow in a fragmented stream of consciousness, echo linguistically and sonically the film's visual interplay of light and shadow, foregrounding the themes of presence and absence that haunt the Primitive Project. Over these words, the screen goes black as the camera loses vision momentarily when it moves behind a wall, while the sound of the hoes tapping at the ground pricks the soundscape like an out-of-time metronome.

Suddenly, a loud, guttural, (seemingly non-diegetic) grating noise begins – its low bass tones jarring with the high-pitched rhythmic tapping of the soldiers' hoes –

creating a pervasive sense of malevolence and foreboding.[387] This sound continues over a visual cut to another, larger collection of framed photographs and certificates on a wall along with crude sketches of spaceship designs drawn by the teenagers – barely visible at first in the dim light. For Susan Sontag, the photograph is 'something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or death mask…never less than the registering of an emanation'.[388] Here, the themes of absence and presence are felt most poignantly, as these faces stare out mutely from the frame like death masks, while the unnerving juxtaposition of diegetic and nondiegetic sound takes the place of their disavowed speech. Reverberating with remembered stories of the political 'disappeared', the mysterious use of sounds (and telling silences) juxtaposed against these images inevitably leads to questions. Are these nameless figures the men and women who have deserted these houses? Why did they leave? Did they bear witness to what happened all those years ago? Roger Hallas argues that '[t]he act of bearing witness presupposes the logic of habeas corpus – you must have the body. The witness must be present at the site and the moment of testimony's enunciation'.[389] Instead, these photographs offer only a pale shadow as the absent body of the witness becomes a structuring absence that resonates uncannily throughout the entirety of the installation.

Another acousmatic voice begins to read from the letter, and for the first time refers directly to the region's troubled past, stating bluntly: 'Soldiers once occupied this place. They killed and tortured the villagers until everyone fled into the jungle'. Juxtaposed against these words is a close-up of two more framed photographs (one of a woman in her fifties, another of a man about the same age). The camera moves over them very slowly, heightening the sense of poignancy that this juxtaposition brings about as light dances on the glass, creating an uncanny sense of animation. The subjects' gaze seems on some level to demand acknowledgement of the *actuality* of their existence – of what Roland Barthes calls

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[387] This is a horror-genre sound strongly reminiscent of the chilling 'swing'/'blackboard scraping' sound used by sound designer, Yoshiya Obara in Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998*)* and creates a similar sense of unease and supernaturalism.

[388] Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), p. 154.

[389] Roger Hallas, 'Sound, Image and the Corporeal Implication of Witnessing in Derek Jarman's *Blue*' in Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (eds.), *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), p. 37.

the 'having-been-there' – a first step towards acknowledging a place for personal memory within public discourse, a place habitually denied by authoritarian regimes. As if to underscore this sense of absent-presentness, the sound of the wind outside again begins to build, signalling that a storm is on its way. The camera then moves fully out of the houses for the first time, to a nearby wooded area (the continuity of an ambiguous drone/scratching/grating sound across the edit suggests spatial continuity). Cutting back briefly to an interior shot before the screen goes black for the credits, the drone continues over the sound of static, insects buzzing, and a loud staccato, crackling noise, broken up by a sudden repetitive beat like artillery fire. This powerful use of dislocated, acousmatic sound evokes a sense of violence that is all the more chilling because of its detachment from a visible source. Significantly, this abstract disconnect of sound and image represents Nabua as a haunted landscape and at the same time is suggestive of a continuous, pervasive threat of violence that is perceived everywhere though not seen. The crackling sound that recalls artillery fire seems to fracture the living present, creating a 'time out of joint'. While we see no ghosts, the sound itself seems to take on a spectral presence by calling us back to the oppressed past of this haunted landscape through the 'dislocated time of the present'.[390]

A Hybrid Hauntology

An integral part of the Primitive Project, Apichatpong's most recent film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (*Loong Boonmee Raleuk Chaat*, 2010), continues the focus on the memories of the northeast as it chronicles the last hours of Uncle Boonmee's life. Suffering from chronic kidney disease, he is visited by the ghost of his dead wife, Huay, who has come to ease his transition through death, and his son, Boonsong who, having disappeared several years earlier, returns in the form of a monkey ghost to warn his father of the hungry spirits who await his death. Boonmee's sister-in-law Jen and his nephew Tong, an ordained monk, have also

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[390] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, op. cit., p. 17.

come up from the city to stay with him on his farm and help with his care, bearing witness to the strange events that lead up to his death. *Uncle Boonmee* makes an implicit connection between the nature of human life in Buddhist philosophy (birth-suffering-death-rebirth) with the cycles of the natural world; the film is thus a meditation on life, death, transformation, and renewal, continuing the themes of Apichatpong's earlier films. While the *Primitive* installation focussed on the desire to forget and the creation of new memories, *Uncle Boonmee* portrays the memories of one man's past lives in various incarnations over hundreds of years in an oneiric, stream-of-consciousness.

The film is structured around a number of flashback vignettes of Boonmee's past lives (a water-buffalo, a princess, a fish – perhaps also the wind, trees and insects that make their presence felt throughout the film on the soundtrack). Yet, unlike the flashback scenes in *Syndromes and a Century* and indeed, the more 'conventional' memory film described by Maureen Turim, these moments in the film are not motivated causally through the narrative. Importantly, the fluidity of the film's movement between these different temporalities (and embodiments) suggests that while they exist 'in the past' their presence is nonetheless felt in the present with equal force to the characters of Boonmee and his family.

This sense of fluidity between different lives and temporalities is also felt through the films' blurring of boundaries between the fictional world and the body of the audio-viewer – foregrounding a sense of transference and intersubjectivity – an effect achieved primarily, I argue, through the use of sound. This is perhaps most evident towards the end of the film when in his final hours, Boonmee and his loved ones make a long pilgrimage through the jungle to a distant cave that he remembers from a past life, where he wants to die. As they make their way through the dense forest by torchlight (trailed by several monkey ghosts), the darkness heightens our awareness of the natural sounds of the environment. A monkey squeaks, crickets chirp, leaves brush past their bodies, twigs snap loudly underfoot, insects buzz – all making the jungle seem to pulsate with life. Boonmee struggles through the thick forest, his strained breathing made audible on the soundtrack through aural close-up. This use of sound, combined with the hand-held camerawork which films Boonmee's body from just behind him, creates a sense of intimacy between the

spectator, Boonmee, and the environment, as if we are there with him on his journey through the jungle, perhaps one of the many invisible spirits guiding him.

This emphasis on the materialism of film sound and the audio-viewer's relationship to it has been theorised by Laura U. Marks as 'haptic hearing'. She argues that, with haptic sound, 'the aural boundaries between body and world may feel indistinct: the rustle of trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest cavity and move my body for the inside'.[391] This permeability between the spectator's body and the sounds of the film emulates the blurring of boundaries between human, animal and plant life in the animist tradition.[392] Described by anthropologists such as Nurit Bird-David as a 'relational epistemology and/or intersubjective ontology',[393] animism's foregrounding of the notion of exchange and transformation provides us with a way of thinking about film form and aesthetics from a regional perspective, one that also connects with established lines of thought grounded in phenomenology and theories of embodied spectatorship.

However, this sense of permeability also suggests something about the fluidity of memory itself. If past lives are all around us, shaping but also being shaped by our present, we cannot think of them as static or fixed in the temporality of some distant past. Through its use of what might be called its 'animist aesthetic', the film suggests rather that it is through transference and transformation that memory might also shape what is to come. Like the ghost figures in the films described by Bliss Cua Lim that speak of past injustices, the animist aesthetic in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* similarly seems to call for a sense of historical accountability out of concern for an ethical future.

The connection between ethics, death and politics is drawn out by May Adadol Ingawanij in her essay, 'Observing Life's Remains' in which she asserts:

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[391] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses.* op. cit., p. 183.
[392] Animism is an ancient belief system practiced widely in Southeast Asia that sees inanimate objects and phenomena in nature such as trees, mountains, rivers, and the elements as having a spirit – often embodying the souls of deceased relatives and loved ones.
[393] Nurit Bird-David, 'Animism Revisited: Personhood, Environment, and Relational Epistemology', *Current Anthropology*, 40.51 (February 1999), pp. 567 – 591.

> Looking at politics and everyday life it is clear that in Southeast Asia modernity has not been accompanied by secularisation; the peculiarity of 'our' loss of experience does not seem to have come hand in hand with a scientific suppression of irrationality. In 'our' modernity, film and video are imbricated with supernaturally inclined politics – the performativity of magic and mediumship in claiming power, justice, and resistance – as well as with daily life's seamless observance of the calls of restless souls.[394]

May Adadol's discussion of the relationship between politics, everyday life, and the supernatural here chimes with Derrida's ethics of accountability – his 'being-with spectres' – in *Spectres of Marx*; both texts are connected by the word 'justice'. As has been a common thread running through this thesis, the notion of justice has particular resonance in oppressive regimes such as Thailand, in which personal narratives of the past are frequently, if not *habitually*, overridden by dominant historiographies. Importantly, therefore, the film's play on fluidity and temporality as it moves through Boonmee's different lives is crucial to its sense of accountability, as throughout the film the weight of the past bears heavily on its central character who seems to feel a profound sense of regret. In one scene, for example, he apologises to Huay – we do not know what for and she does not respond (a silence that recalls the elliptical narrative of *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* – foregrounding the many absences and silences that pervade both our memories of the past and the historical documentation of it). This sense of regret also extends more broadly, however, to his involvement with the northeast's troubled history as details of its violent past surface during a conversation between Boonmee and Jen, the morning after her arrival. As they wait for Boonmee's carer in a shelter by the tamarind grove on his plantation, he tells his sister-in-law that he believes that his illness is a result of bad karma for having killed 'too many communists' and 'a lot of bugs' on his farm.[395] Jen tries to reassure him that he had 'killed with good intentions' as she says, 'You killed the commies for the nation, right? Like my father'. Unconvinced, Boonmee answers, 'For the nation? Or what?' as he lies back on the wooden floor, sighing wistfully.

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[394] May Adadol Ingawanij, 'Observing Life's Remains', 55. *Internationale Kurzefilmtage Oberhausen, Festivalkatalog*, 2009, p. 100.
[395] In the scene leading up to this conversation, Boonmee's workers were shown spraying the fruit trees in the orchard with insecticide.

The conflation of different temporalities (past, present, future) reaches its apogee in a scene that takes place towards the end of the film when Boonmee and his family have reached the cave where he has decided to die. As Boonmee lies on the ground drifting in and out of consciousness, he asks the others, 'What's wrong with my eyes? They are open but I can't see a thing. Or are my eyes closed?' He tells his family that he remembers that he was born here, in a life that he cannot remember: 'I only know that I was born here', he says. 'I don't know if I was a human or an animal, a woman or a man'. As he says this, the image cuts to a still photograph from the installation of a young man dressed in army camouflage leading a tall ape-figure across a field (similar to the monkey ghosts that surround them). In voiceover, Boonmee begins to describe a dream he had in which he had travelled to the future:

> Last night I dreamt of the future. I arrived there in a sort of time machine. The future city was ruled by an authority able to make anybody disappear. When they found 'past people', they shone a light at them. That light projected images of them onto the screen from the past, until their arrival in the future. Once those images appeared, these 'past people' disappeared. I was afraid of being captured by the authorities because I had many friends in this future. I ran away. But wherever I ran, they still found me. They asked me if I knew this road, or that road. I told them I didn't know. And then I disappeared.

Like the revenant in Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, Boonmee's voice seems to give testimony to a future-past – creating a disjunctive sense of temporality by forming a narrative seemingly drawn from memories of both the past and the future. Boonmee's monologue and the use of multi-layered temporalities through the layering of sound and image have particularly powerful resonance in the context of Thailand's 'culture of amnesia' as they radically destabilise the idea of the past as being static and fixed. To quote Derrida, 'this being-with spectres' is Apichatpong's 'politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations'.[396]

Throughout this monologue, there is a constant 'white noise' of electronic sounds mixed with the intense noise of insect stridulation on the soundtrack juxtaposed against more images from the Nabua installation of teenagers dressed as

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[396] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* , op. cit.

soldiers. This improvised music by Koichi Shimizu and Thom AJ Madson creates a mesmeric, trance-like drone with a dull thud like a quickened heartbeat that repeatedly intensifies before drawing back as if in a refrain. The film cuts to a shot of Boonmee lying down against the walls of the cave; his eyes are closed and Huay and Jen are on either side of him holding his hands, listening to him. The white noise continues as Huay gently unfastens the buttons on his shirt and removes the cap of his dialysis tube. As she lets the liquid drain out of his body, Boonmee watches while Jen asks, 'Huay?' but does not stop her. The sound of the water running away is the sound of Boonmee's spirit seeping out of his body as the memories of his many lifetimes slip away with him. In the morning, the white noise on the soundtrack has abated and been replaced by the more familiar ambient sounds of birds, animals, and insects. As Jen wakes, she looks over at Boonmee's lifeless body. The film then cuts abruptly to a panoramic shot of the mountainous jungle landscape that by contrast seems to burst with life. The sounds of the environment build again in volume and momentum, reaching a piercing intensity as the shrillness of its upper register and the deep resonance of its lower sounds vibrate thunderously, dominating all other sound. In a breathtaking aural transition, the sound bleeds over a visual cut to a Buddhist temple and merges seamlessly with the sound of monks chanting. Tong (now in monk's robes) and Jen are amongst the mourners.

Resonating with earlier moments in Apichatpong's films, where 'natural' ambient or environmental sounds are similarly heightened to such excess that they become *denaturalised*, these sounds in Apichatpong's films become 'sonorous objects' whose *materiality* insists on the listener's embodied engagement. Against this transcendental soundscape, the fans on the ceiling whirl round (a visual echo of the circular dirt tracks shown earlier in the photographic montage sequence), subtly building on the rhythm of the sounds and creating a tangible sense of the continuity of life while the intense materiality of the sound seems to draw in our bodies *as part of* this cycle.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

A Politics of Memory

> Memories are histories as they were lived, felt, thought, and interpreted. Official history written into textbooks and displayed in museums and memorials embodies one particular kind of memory, that of the regime, and is motivated by a logic of legitimation.
>
> — Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang[397]

This thesis emerged out of a curiosity about the expressive potential of sound in film. Expanding on Robert Stam's idea that sound and image tracks in film can 'mutually jostle, undercut [and] haunt…each other', creating what he calls a 'heterochronic… cinema', I have argued that close analysis of a film's sound design can sometimes reveal a break in the seamlessness of a film's narrative and formal structure when sound and image are used asynchronously.[398] Synthesising Stam's formal approach with the theoretical framework of temporal critique put forward by Bliss Cua Lim in her study of the ghost film, I have argued that, like the ghost figure, this use of 'unruly' sound can similarly disrupt the concept of time as linear and the nation-state as a stable, homogenous entity. Through the use of 'spectral sound', I have argued, film form can itself be political – creating a sense of temporal dislocation that 'makes the present waver'.[399] Here the certainties of a 'self-contained' present that fails to acknowledge its debt to both the past and the future are shaken by a historical consciousness that refuses to forget.

Importantly, what connects the filmmakers in this study is that the films of Bahman Ghobadi, Jia Zhangke and Apichatpong Weerasethakul are all set against a background of historical trauma and political censorship. The nation-states of Iran,

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[397] Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang, Introduction: Memory, Power, and Culture in Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang, (eds.), *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China* (Woodrow Wilson Press: Washington, D.C. and Stanford University Press: Stanford California, 2007), p. 3.

[398] Robert Stam, 'Beyond Third Cinema: The Aesthetics of Hybridity' op. cit.

[399] Frederic Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter' in Michael Sprinkler (ed.), *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 38.

China and Thailand have all, in some way, suppressed aspects of the past, as official discourse has silenced popular and personal memories in order to maintain political stability. As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone have described, however, where memories are contested, the concern 'is very often not conflicting accounts of what actually happened in the past so much as the question of who or what is entitled to speak for that past in the present'.[400] Thus, by foregrounding the memories and heterogeneous experiences of characters who speak from the social, political and economic margins, these films, I have argued, demonstrate a concern for what Derrida calls the 'politics of memory', and I have used his metaphor of 'being-with spectres' in my analysis of the films both formally and thematically as I investigated the politically disruptive potential of 'unruly' sound.

In response to the 'silencing' of unofficial memories in authoritarian regimes, this thesis has focussed on the act of listening – drawing attention to the counter-discursive strategies at work in the films' different uses of sound and suggesting ways that we might think of film as testimony. My approach here has engaged with, and at times critiqued, traditional film sound theory exemplified by the work of Michel Chion and Mary Ann Doane amongst others. However, I feel my own contribution, in terms of further developing theoretical and methodological tools applicable to the field, lies in the study's eclectic use of a number of different interdisciplinary sound studies perspectives. Drawing on existing research in the fields of acoustic anthropology, aural history, musicology and sound art, through the work of Steven Feld, Jacques Attali, R. Murray Schafer, Alain Corbin, Emily Thompson, Brandon LaBelle and Pierre Schaeffer amongst others, this study has explored how the films articulate the historical, cultural and material dimensions of sound in ways that I hope can be readily transferable to other cinematic and audio-visual contexts.

In particular, Steven Feld's work on acoustemology – specifically in relation to questions of subjectivity and perception – has provided an overarching methodological framework throughout this thesis, which I have worked through alongside Stam. Recognising the centrality of sound in people's lived experience of

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[400] Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 1.

'knowing and being in the world', an acoustemological approach is rooted in a phenomenology of sound that foregrounds the embodied nature of experience and perception.[401] Following Feld, across each of the films I have demonstrated how acoustemology communicates an intensely personal experience of sound in terms of how the subject perceives, and is positioned by, the acoustic dynamics of social space, at the same time as drawing attention to the broader cultural and historical dimensions of sound as they are represented in film. In this way, an acoustemological approach when applied to an analysis of film sound can provide insight into a character's interiority and sense of self, as well as the mood and feel of the time and place in which the film is set (drawing on what Raymond Williams called its 'structures of feeling').[402]

Throughout my analysis of the films, I have drawn out a connection between sound's material qualities and its symbolic potential for thinking about time and memory – suggesting that sound's evanescence makes it a particularly powerful metaphor for 'minor' histories that are unrecorded in official archives. Crucially, however, I have argued that this sense of sound's fragility as it is experienced in lived space alters in our experience of sound in cinema as the processes of recording sound allow it to be 'captured' and 'held on to'. In this way, I have suggested, the films' soundscapes create what might be called a virtual 'vernacular' archive that repositions counter-memories within the discourse of the present rather than allowing them to be lost to history. Drawing on the work of Mary Ann Doane on cinema and the archive, I have argued that both the 'archivability' of film and its inherent 'historicity' have important political implications for films produced in cultures of censorship because of film's ability to preserve, and give testimony of, the histories, memories and experiences that it depicts.

This idea of 'film as testimony' has particular significance for my analysis of the use of sound in the films of Bahman Ghobadi in Chapter Two. By foregrounding the voices of civilian victims of war and repositioning them centrally within the war narrative, I argue that Ghobadi's films present an important alternative to the

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[401] Steven Feld, 'A Rainforest Acoustemology' op. cit., p. 226

[402] Raymond Williams, 'Structures of Feeling' in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 128 – 135.

dominant accounts of Kurdish history. Film sound has the potential, therefore, to play a crucial *restorative* role in the war film in that it can articulate a sense of the characters' subjectivity that is so often denied to civilian victims of war in official records. In Ghobadi's films, this sense of 'restoration' is fundamentally about a Derridean concern for *justice* and historical accountability in the sense that they reposition these experiences centrally within the discourse of the present, refusing to allow them to be swept aside as part of the detritus of war. While I do draw out comparisons with the use of sound in other films in the war genre in this chapter, a future line of research I wish to pursue in more depth relates to this idea that sound can play a role in situating characters in relation to positions of power. While studies on the war film have tended to focus on the perspectives of soldiers in this respect, the discussion could be developed further in relation to the experiences of civilians during wartime. Films that depict rape as an act of war, for example, seem to have particular resonance here and this is a line of research that I intend to develop in the near future.

Chapter Three continued the discussion of the subjective experience of sound, analysing its use in the films of Jia Zhangke. However, while Chapter Two described subjective sound in terms of interiority, this chapter moves the focus outwards, to discuss how the use of sound in films can convey a sense of the lived experience of the acoustic environment within which the subject is positioned. Following the work on sound and authority by Jacques Attali and Alain Corbin, who argue that sound has the ability to make material the abstract notion of power – both mapping out and 'occupying' territory – I have argued that in film, this experience of sound can be transposed into a cinematic 'soundscape', which can similarly articulate the changing power dynamics over the period of time in which the film is set. In Jia's films this use of soundscape provides something close to an aural history of the PRC charting the early days of the reform-era to contemporary postsocialism. The connection with time and history here is significant because it demonstrates how film sound has a particularly powerful way of articulating the relationship between memory (both personal and social) and history. This, I have suggested, is because it can express the dialectic between the public and the private

by establishing both the atmosphere of an era within the diegetic space of the film, and by setting the (often conflicting) emotional tone for each scene.

In relation to the ability of sound to convey mood, this chapter also draws on music theory, and in particular the work of George Revill on the relationship between music and nationalism. Taking on board Revill's view that music should be considered part of the overall 'geography' of sound, I have suggested that across the films, it provides a sense of the flow of time – evoking firstly a sense of communist ideology in the performance of nationalist propaganda songs, and later, through illegal gangtai pop music, the growing desire for reform. I have argued that music can 'take us back' to a time in the past because of its ability to connect with our emotions – whether through its tonal quality or through personal association. Because of its affective charge, music, of any genre, can be extremely powerful at expressing *feeling* and because of this ability, it is often used in film to provide a sense of depth or 'texture' in the representation of a character's experiences and sense of self. This connection also suggests ways in which memory is perhaps always cultural – the *process of remembering* always involving an assemblage of sounds and images that do not come from within us, but from the external world through which we move. Consequently, I argued in this chapter that while the films of the Fifth Generation produced a very particular, often idealised, 'version' of the past through their use of epic narratives, by contrast, those of Jia Zhangke were concerned with reflecting the 'ordinariness' and heterogeneity of 'everyday' memory while at the same articulating a deep sense of historical consciousness.

Building on this idea, in Chapter Four, I argued that in presenting an 'archive of experience', Apichatpong's films draw not only on the director's own personal memories but also on broader aspects of 'cultural remembering'.[403] Bringing together influences and sources from a wide variety of storytelling traditions, I argued that the films blur the boundaries of personal and social memory while appealing to the audio-viewer's shared, embodied experience of *how* we remember, encouraging a sense of connection and intersubjectivity through sound.

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[403] Karen Newman, 'A Man Who Can Recall His Past Lives: Installations by Apichatpong Weerasethakul' in James Quandt (ed.), *Apichatpong Weerasethakul* (Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009), p. 143.

Exploring Alison Landsberg's claim that '[m]emory remains a sensuous phenomenon experienced by the body…deri[ving] much of its power through affect', this chapter developed further the connection made earlier between sound, memory and the body as I argued that the films' 'affective soundscapes' communicate directly, and at times, almost *viscerally*, what Richard Dyer has called the 'texture' of memory.[404] Apichatpong's affective soundscapes are created through the use of pop music (expressing jouissance), but also through the deliberate heightening of 'natural' ambient or environmental sounds to the extent that they become almost 'denaturalised'. Detached from their source or informational purpose, these sounds become 'sonorous objects'. The *materiality* of these 'objects' dismantles our reliance on the verbal or the linguistic to ground our understanding of the narrative by encouraging an embodied, phenomenological engagement with the scene. This use of sound has clear resonance with Callard and Papoulis' argument that theories of affect problematise the association of memory with interiority, foregrounding instead a shared sense of what remembering feels like by appealing to the audio-viewer's embodied self. In contrast to the highly controlled sounds of public information broadcasts and revolutionary songs in the films of Jia Zhangke and the oppressive sounds of warfare in Bahman Ghobadi's films, the sound design of Apichatpong's work foregrounds noise – stressing 'the incontrollability of matter…[and]…the enigmatic pulses of everyday life' – thus presenting a clear rejection of the orderly 'monologism' of the state.[405]

The sense of 'unruliness' evoked here is also an important aspect of my discussion of the politics of voice in Apichatpong's work that again has resonance across the thesis as a whole. In my analysis of *Mysterious Object at Noon*, I demonstrated how the film's emphasis on plurality creates a complex discursive space that refuses the authority of a single voice or speaking position – connecting it with the Bakhtinian concept of 'heteroglossia' in that it presents a potentially disruptive force that destabilises the notion of a unified, 'monologic' culture. An analysis of voice in film must pay attention not only to the words that are spoken,

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[404] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memories*, op. cit., p. 8.
[405] Juan A. Suárez, 'Structural Film: Noise' in Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (eds.), *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 85

but also to how the voice *sounds* (how it is recorded) and to the many non-verbal sounds and rhythms that it produces (Barthes' 'grain of the voice'). Importantly, the presence of sighs, hesitations, repetitions and overlaps in this film – which can also be heard at several points in the films of Bahman Ghobadi and Jia Zhangke – evoke a sense of temporal instability, and mimic the ways in which memory is shaped by moments of forgetfulness and doubt just as it can also be trapped in a cycle of traumatic (and sometimes even mundane) return. Crucially, however, these gaps in speech, like the disjunctive use of archival sound and image footage in the films, present a radical alternative to the linearity of state discourse that, by contrast, is grounded in the *undisciplined* nature of memory.

Importantly, the sense of reciprocality and exchange between speaker and listener that is foregrounded throughout the narrative of *Mysterious Object at Noon* also relates more widely to the concerns of this thesis as a whole – specifically in relation to the notion of intersubjectivity. Following Brandon LaBelle's assertion that the intersubjective qualities of sound and listening make the boundary between self and other permeable, I have argued that this idea has particular resonance when imagined through the discursive framework of listener-witness as it leads us to an understanding of an ethical spectatorship that is based on a sense of shared feeling. By thinking of spectatorship in these terms – not as an isolating experience but as one that necessarily makes affective connections between people – we get to the core of Derrida's 'politics of memory', which is fundamentally concerned with the question of 'inheritance' – crucially, the *passing on* of knowledge from one to another.

Chapter Two explores this idea in detail in relation to Ghobadi's *A Time for Drunken Horses*. Drawing on Doane's suggestion that when voices are detached from their visible sources in film, they speak directly to the audio-viewer, 'constituting him/her as an empty space to be 'filled' with knowledge'.[406] In scenes where this occurs in Ghobadi's films, the audio-viewer might be thought of as a 'cipher' through which knowledge is channelled. Through the use of close-perspective recording techniques, films' soundtracks can create a sense of closeness and intimacy – bringing

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[406]Mary Ann Doane, 'The Voice in Film', op. cit.

about a feeling of reciprocity and empathy. Critiquing Chion's concept of the i-voice – an approach grounded in psychoanalytic models of spectatorship, I have argued that in Ghobadi's film as the audio-viewer listens to the sound of the voice, he or she does not 'internalize… the voice *as their own*' as he imagines it, but rather transforms the child's speech *through the act of listening* from an expression of embodied memory to testimony.

The significance of this in relation to cinematic spectatorship has resonance across the thesis as a whole as it marks a significant move away from image-based psychoanalytic models of spectatorship (based on Lacan's 'mirror-stage') epitomised by the work of Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey, towards a recognition of the role of sound and affect in allowing us to make empathetic connections with others**.** Shifting the focus from the image to sound – and in particular, to the interplay of sound and image – significantly enriches our understanding of film's potential to make meaning and allows us to consider spectatorship in much more positive, potentially progressive, terms. In this respect, my approach to film spectatorship has much in common with Alison Landsberg who argues that 'any ethical relationship to the other requires empathy' – which, following Levinas, she defines as 'a recognition of the profound difference and unknowability of the other, and a simultaneous sense of commitment and responsibility toward him/her even in the face of such differences'.[407]

This sense of commitment and responsibility chimes with Derrida and Benjamin's sense of historical accountability. As Landsberg suggests, empathy created through a sense of intersubjectivity enables us to 'see and act differently'.[408] It thus allows for a politicised encounter with film as the audio-viewer bears witness to the oppressed memories and histories that the films evoke. For Derrida, as for the filmmakers in this study, 'no ethics, no politics…seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no

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[407] Alison Landsberg, 'Prosthetic Memory: The Ethics and Politics of Memory in an Age of Mass Culture' in Paul Grainge (ed.), *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 147.
[408] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: the Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 150.

longer or for those others who are not yet there'.[409] This 'being-with spectres' is crucial to the formation of ethical politics – an ethics grounded in a sense of accountability that bears *responsibility* to the past and to the 'ghosts' of past injustices that haunt both present and future generations. Through their focus on *remembering*, the films in this study offer a critique of what Benjamin calls the 'future-orientated present' and a resistance to the deliberate silencing and 'enforced forgetting' of dominant discourse.

Alert to the ways in which the 'unruliness' of film sound can offer a form of temporal critique that destabilises the concept of the homogenous, linear time of the nation-state, 'Cinema's Spectral Sounds' has argued that film sound can play a crucial *restorative* role in film, in that it can reposition oppressed memories and experiences centrally within the discourse of the present. There remains, however, a great deal to be explored about film sound in relation to this idea. While having obvious relevance for the history and memory film, as I suggested earlier, all films that have the potential to 'disrupt' hegemony out of concern for justice – whether through issues of gender, sexuality, race or class – could, I hope, productively adapt my approach.[410] It is my hope, therefore, that the methodology I have developed can provide analytical tools that can be applied across different genres, texts and contexts, offering new insights into the expressive possibilities of sound.

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[409] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. xviii.
[410] Although I address questions of gender in my analysis of Ghobadi's *Turtles Can Fly* and, briefly, sexuality with regards to Apichatpong's *Tropical Malady*, these aspects have not been fully drawn out in this thesis, and I feel that the methodology – specifically the disruptive potential of 'unruly' sound – could be productively applied to these approaches to film and media texts. The work of Sara Ahmed in her *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), for example, could perhaps be productively brought into dialogue with this approach.

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