
New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics

REMAPPING TAIPEI

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The social totality is only sensed, as it were, from the outside. We will never see it as such. It can be tracked like a crime whose clues we accumulate, not knowing that we are ourselves parts and organs of this obscenely moving and stirring zoological monstrosity. But most often, in the modern itself, its vague and nascent concept begins to awaken with the knowledge function, very much like a book whose characters do not know that they are being read: the spectator alone knows that the lovers have missed each other by only five minutes, or that Iago has lied to the hero's uncle, giving him a view of the partners' motives that will never be corrected in this life, but that has disastrous consequences. These known misunderstandings bring into being a new kind of purely aesthetic emotion, which is not exactly pity and fear but for which "irony" is a used-up word whose original acceptation can only lend to conjecture. That it is purely aesthetic, however, means that it is conceivable only in conjunction with the work of art, cannot take place in real life, and has something to do with the omniscient author who is alone supposed to observe these disjointed occurrences, unknown to each other, save when the gaze of the author, rising over miniature rooftops, puts them back together and declares them to be the material of storytelling, or literature. But the author must discover such ironies and not invent them: omniscience is like providence and not like creation. Nor does the chance seem to come often, or in every kind of social formation: the urban seems propitious to it, infinitely assembling the empty spaces of such meetings or missed encounters, while the modern (or the romantic) seems to supply the other vital ingredient, namely the sense of authorial function or of the omniscient social witness. Perhaps it also serves to seal in the monads in some airtight way, thus heightening the astonishing fact of their synchronicity.

Tom Jones and indeed the Byzantine novel itself made their living on the fact of sheer coincidence (which generally involved the mysteries of birth and genealogy); but only in the age of the modern is individual life driven so deeply into its isolated "point of view" that it is no longer capable of peeping out above the barrier. Modern relativistic plot and its fundamental category, the unity of "point of view," come into being only at the moment of late Victorian individualism, in which the monadic close of the individual self becomes a desperate case, projecting just such an abstract representational form - a kind of relativistic synchronicity in which a multiplicity of monads is imagined separately and, as it were, from above, in but the most fitful relationship with one another - as its expression and its compensation alike. The supreme plot formation of this period then undertakes impossibly and paradoxically to reunite all these isolated monads, taking the older providential form mentioned above as its distant pattern. But we may be forgiven for thinking that its spirit is the inverse of that earlier one; there, unification of the multiple destinies and strands had the effect of reassuring its subjects of the ultimate unity of the social totality, and of God's design. Here, everything that is stunning about the accidents and peripeties that draw these isolated subjects together (crossing their paths, often on the mode of showing their own individual ignorance of that momentary co-presence to space) would

seem, by its very ephemerality, to have the effect of driving us all individually and privately back ever more deeply into our isolation, and of assuring us that the providence effect is little more than an aesthetic one: the bravura gesture of a Romantic or a modern, which corresponds to nothing in lived experience. I think, for example, of a wonderful book by Ann Banfield on another narrative and representational peculiarity, the so-called style indirect *libre*: her very title, *Unspeakable Sentences*, conveys the argument that such sentence structure can be found only in written and printed narrative and not in any speaker's mouth. So also it is with the irony of synchronous monadic simultaneity; no human subject has ever known it as an existential experience, nor has ever witnessed it as an observing subject. To attribute it to God is as grotesque as imagining God following our innermost thoughts and muttering them out in His own form of style indirect *libre*.

Yet a return to our present context draws us up sharply and reminds us that the movie camera is also just such a nonhuman apparatus apt to produce effects and simulated "experiences" that no one can possibly have had in real individual human or existential life: even filmic "point of view" is less realistic than the other, written kind, since it shows us the viewer along with the viewed and has to include the viewing subject's body in the contents of the allegedly subjective experience, as if to mark that as seen by someone. Such artificial constructs then pose the philosophical problem of how to evaluate seemingly artificial or secondary "experiences" generated prosthetically - they are evidently real, but at the same time unauthentic or untruthful insofar as they include the suggestion that the new experience-construct is somehow natural or the same as ordinary or everyday viewing or experiencing. But this philosophical problem of film (which impossibly offers, as Cavell has argued, the world viewed without ourselves present) is no doubt already implicit in the problematic of McLuhanism; and the evaluation of a then equally new experience (writing, reading, printing) that is not natural either and that offers just such peculiar nonexistential experienceconstructs as the one Ann Banfield described in her book.

The phenomenon of the providential plot, therefore, and the narrative of synchronous monadic simultaneity (henceforth, SMS) are thus compounded by the intersection with film and its philosophical problems; and those compounds are multiply compounded by the matter of modernism and postmodernism, which respecifies the SMS plot as a specifically modernist phenomenon and also, in the era of video, raises some questions as to the positioning of film itself as a medium. Historical and periodizing questions of that kind, however, require attention to the ambiguity of the term "postmodernism" itself, which must designate a whole historical period and its "structure of feeling" in the preceding sentence, but which risks here slipping inappreciably into the rather different sense of an aesthetic style or set of formal properties. The slippage is significant, since it has been argued that much of the content of what has been called, in art, architecture, and thought alike, postmodern is in reality modernist - indeed, that it is possible that a pure postmodernism is *a priori* impossible as such, but must always involve the treatment of essentially modernist residues. The return, therefore, of what looks like a Western modernist narrative paradigm (the SMS) in the work of a Third World filmmaker (in the thick of postmodernity as a global tendency, if not a global cultural and social reality)

can be expected to raise new questions, which do not include the relatively idle one, debated by critics and journalists at the film's first showing in its native Taiwan, as to whether the director had sold out to essentially Westernizing methods or style.²

Indeed, I am tempted to say that this particular question disqualifies itself, today, by standing revealed as a specifically modernist one: in the great debates, in all the colonial countries, over nativism and Westernization, modernization versus traditional ideals and values, fighting the imperialist with his own weapons and his own science or reviving an authentic national (and cultural-national) spirit, the West connotes the modern as such in a way that it no longer can when the modernization process is tendentially far more complete and no longer particularly marked as Western. (No one asked the Ayatollah whether the use of audiocassettes marked a corrupt surrender to Western technology and values.)

I suspect, in any case, that the opposite of Westernization in such contemporary arguments cannot be China itself (even assuming that each speaker had some relatively clear conception of Chinese aesthetic values and social realities in mind), but that its empty place must rather be filled by the question of some putative Taiwanese identity that is itself as much a problem as it is a solution. In that sense, perhaps what is being objected to in the film by Edward Yang (Yang Dechang) is not so much its failure to be Chinese or Taiwanese as the relative absence from it of any ostensible worry about the nature of Taiwanese identity, or any rehearsal of its very possibility. Indeed, it does seem to be the case that *Terrorizer* (a peculiar and pointed translation of *Kongbu fenzi*, 1986) assimilates modernization, and the toll it takes on psychic subjects, more generally to urbanization than to Westernization as such. This lends its "diagnosis" a kind of globality, if not a universality, which is evidently what has made Yang's critics uncomfortable. Yet it cannot be said that Taipei (Taipei) is a modern, Westernstyle city in the same way that one could affirm this of Shanghai, for example. Rather it is an example of some generally late capitalist urbanization (which one hesitates, except to make the point, to call postmodern) of a now-classic proliferation of the urban fabric that one finds in the First and Third Worlds everywhere alike. But if, as I am arguing here, it no longer makes much sense to talk about such cities in terms of an opposition between Western and traditional, then it would seem to follow that the opposite term is equally problematized and that notions of national and ethnic identity (of the modernist type) are equally threatened by postmodernity. (What the television brings us in the way of civil war and nationality struggle - most notably from the former Soviet Union - is something quite different from that, which we have every interest in identifying properly as the media phenomenon of neoethnicity, a simulacrum in which it is no longer a question of *belief*, in any religious sense, but very much a question of *practices*. Ethnicity is something one is condemned to; neoethnicity is something one decides to reaffirm about oneself.)³

In any case, nothing is more distant from the stylistic features and formal problematic of the so-called Taiwanese new wave than the "Fifth Generation" filmmaking in the People's Republic that is contemporaneous with it. The latter indeed seems marked by properly epic ambitions, in particular reaffirming its landscapes in a fashion that is utterly different from the ways in which Hong Kong or Taiwan space is given, constructed, and experienced. A specific stylistic mannerism marks this particular ambition (this is not the

moment to "decide" whether it is authentic or manipulatory, or to attempt to separate out from it what belongs to propaganda and the staging of power and what can be traced back to new and original modes of being-in-the-world). It is what may be termed a kind of aspiration to the bas-relief, the privileging of an epic midshot that associates film and frieze and scans a middle realm of landscape below the mountain peaks, eschewing the foreground plain, sweeping humans and horses along with it in an endless procession of moving figures without feet or heads, like a cinematographic scroll. This new technique of a midpanoramic perspective becomes not merely a stylistic signature for the newer mainland China cinema; it affirms its epic narrativity, by directing attention to a panning across the frieze, as in traditional painterly storytelling, at the same time that it defamiliarizes the conventional relationship of human bodies and their landscape contexts, allowing neither to be grasped independently (in old-fashioned ways) but rather in some new symbiotic relationship of volume to each other that remains to be determined. This epic shot is thus a symbolic act that promises some new utopian combination of what used to be subject and object: politically it claims to constitute some new way of appropriating tradition that is neither iconoclastic nor given over to Western individualism, with what truth one cannot say (save to register the claim as a rival form in competition with that *nostalgia film* which is currently the dominant Western or postmodern form of telling history).

Epics of this kind must necessarily include the countryside (even when the shots are limited to city space): its perceptual allegory, indeed, implies a reduction of the city to human praxis and politics, and reaffirms the immense agricultural hinterland of the peasant masses as its incontrovertible midperspective and wall in depth. Urban mainland film, however, seems to take a very different stylistic turn, as though its relations were not those that led into the Chinese land mass, but rather, the discontinuous vertical openings onto the media and the Pacific Rim, that is to say, on whatever is fantasized as the West. What one notes here, in a film like *Desperation* [*Zuihou de fengkuang*, 1988], for example, a thriller directed by Zhou Xiaowen in the Xian Film Studio whose sheer physical violence takes second place to no equivalent Western product, is a peculiar process whereby the identifying marks of all specific, named cities have been systematically removed, in order to foreground the generically urban. It would be too simple and functional to impute this particular stylistic motivation (whose implementation must, as one can imagine, be very complex) to marketing strategies alone and an attention to a potentially international public; or rather it would be crucial to affirm such base, external motivation, such determination by the extra-aesthetic, in the object world that ultimately, at some wider level of analysis, always rejoin the subject in unexpected ways. In this case, surely, the problems of the market in situations of dependency always somehow rejoin the logic of the collective imaginary and the positioning of that Other to whom cultural and aesthetic production is then also implicitly addressed.

Here what seems initially clear is that the marks of the socioeconomic system must be removed: the consumer of entertainment in the overseas communities must not be distracted by politics, that is to say, by the reminders of a socialist economy in the People's Republic. The high-tech espresso bars and bullet trains of *Desperation* thus dutifully block out a world of contemporary industrial production and

consumption beyond all ideological struggle. Meanwhile, by the same token, the identifying marks of the mainland cities must also be excised, since few viewers of this product will be likely to imagine that Xian, say, or Tianjin is located somewhere in the "Free World"; they must therefore not be allowed to ask themselves such questions, or to begin to identify the city in question in the first place.

It is interesting to compare such neutralization and deidentification procedures - a kind of representational laundering of the ideologically marked contents - with those I have elsewhere described⁴ at work in Western (or, perhaps even more specifically, in U.S.) postmodern films in which, however, it is not the locale but rather the time period that is generalized. In *The Grifters* (1991), for example, a Stephen Frears movie version of Jim Thompson's novel about the 1950s, pains have been taken to remove the markers of 1991 contemporaneity from the Los Angeles-San Diego-Phoenix axis where the story is played out, and leaving aside all the other problems involved in transferring Thompson's plot to the Reagan-Bush era, the impulse can surely also be identified (not altogether successfully) as the attempt to create a time-free indeterminate nostalgia zone for the thriller narrative in which unpleasant reminders of contemporary social - and thereby political - issues and contradictions have been removed.⁵ Thus, a postmodern aesthetic, which at its most vibrant aims at the ideal or Platonic reconstruction of some eternal 1930s or 1940s art deco Miami in a film noir beyond historical time itself, can be socially retraced to its class and ideological roots in a form of collective cultural repression (i.e., in the literal sense of an exclusion from consciousness of painful or disturbing material). The juxtaposition with a specifically Second World form of aesthetic repression (remove the marks of socialism as a system) demands reflection.

Both are in any case relatively distinct from the packaging of specifically Third World international or festival films in national, cultural, and, one is tempted to say, tourist-friendly ways. When the fact of a brand-new locale and unprecedented national provenance is stressed and marketed, as Peter Wollen has observed, what are henceforth termed "new waves" are fresh entries into the international market. I will not belabor the interesting theoretical issues of whether Taiwan is to be counted as a Third World country: if you think the label means Southern-Tier poverty, then it is clearly inappropriate, if not worse; but if it merely affirms something as structural and descriptive as the nonadherence to what is left of the socialist bloc, coupled with the constitutive distance from one of the three great capital centers of the "new world order" (Japan, Western Europe, the United States), then it may be less misleading.

In any case, the Taiwan "new wave" has tended to mark its images as specific to the island, in ways quite distinct from the mainland evocation of landscape. The city is also focused differently here (and *Terrorizer* will be an index of its richness and possibilities), for the obvious reasons that Taipei does not possess the profile or the historical resonance and associations of the great traditional mainland cities, nor is it an all-encompassing closed urban space of a virtual citystate like Hong Kong. Still, its dominance has effectively transformed the natural countryside into a kind of extended suburban space, one in which the survival of more traditional agricultural villages is nonetheless sublimated and somehow modified by their linked association in an intricate web of electric trains that

lead into the capital. The image of these small suburban trains has in the camera work of films by Hou Hsiao-hsien (Hou Xiaoxian) become a virtual new wave logo, particularly in his beautiful *Dust in the Wind* [*Lianlian fengchen*, 1986], in which the empty station and the sound of the train in the distance end up articulating the narrative and standing as signs or shorthand for mutations in the Event. The shots of the commuter train here include the landscape and open to it, utterly unlike the highspeed projectiles that propel the narrative forward in *Desperation* (or in such precursors as Kurosawa's *High and Low*, 1963). The palpable interweavings of the social (no longer, in the late capitalist world system, characterizable as provincial), which are both expressed and signified by this system of recurrent imagery and then peculiarly overdetermined by such intertextuality as the casting of Hou Hsiao-hsien himself as the protagonist in Edward Yang's *Taipei Story* [*Qingmei zhuma*, 1985], the material itself (with the political opening of liberalization) moving toward such ambitious historical chronicles as Hou's *City of Sadness* [*Beiqing chengshi*, 1989] and Edward Yang's *A Brighter Summer Day* [*Guling jie shaonian sharen shijian*, 1991], make of Taiwanese new wave films a kind of linked cycle more satisfying for the viewer than any national cinema I know (save perhaps the French productions of the 1920s and 1930s).

From this cycle, *Terrorizer* stands out starkly as uncharacteristic: sharing none of the potential sentimentalism of the nativist films, its visual elegance has frequently been characterized as cold, as one would a glassy surface that repels identification. Yet *Taipei Story* combined fashion-plate visuality with pathos, and its hero - played, as I have said, by Hou Hsiao-hsien himself - was a nonintellectual, fumbling his way, in the manner of U.S. populism, through a series of odd jots and reverses of fortune. What sets *Terrorizer* off is not the class status of its characters, who are now, as we shall see, professionals and lumpens, but the now-archaic modernity of its theme: art versus life, the novel and reality, mimesis and irony. The co-protagonist is a writer, Chou Yii-fen (Zhou Yufen), with a writer's block (Figure 21) who is freed up by an anonymous phone call denouncing her husband's adulterous affairs, at which point she sits down to write a prize-winning novella about this situation (which has no basis in fact), leaving him in the process. Under other circumstances, the process whereby the possibility of attributing guilt to the husband suddenly grants the wife independence would offer interesting material for interpretation; but Chou Yii-fen's story is only one of four distinct plot strands in this film, whose alternation, I would argue, leaves no distance for reflection of this kind, for interpretive rumination, particularly of this motivational-psychoanalytic type. What does stand out, rather, is the old-fashioned reflexivity of the theme, the residual modernism of the now-familiar mystery of the imitation of art by life and the correspondence of the novel to the aleatory realities of the real world outside. The very embodiment of the theme around the writing of literature and the pathos of the precarious role of the literary "creator" strikes a regressive note in a film of this decidedly contemporary stamp (none of the chronological laundering and neutralizations of nostalgia film here), in the age of the simulacrum and of the dominance of technological media. (In Taiwan, as elsewhere, the aesthetically ambitious now want to become great filmmakers, not great novelists.) This anachronism of literature and its once-interesting reflexive paradoxes is what -

foregrounded, and as it were, quoted here, in the midst of the other plot lines we shall examine in a moment - makes *Terrorizer* relatively conspicuous within contemporary Third-World production, where there are plenty of intellectuals and even writers, but perhaps somewhat less "modernism" in this Western sense.

Andre Gide's *Counterfeiters* (1925) is the prototype of this older classic modernist text. Its protagonist Edouard keeps a journal within the novel about the novel - called "The Counterfeiters" - which he is writing but will perhaps never finish (unlike Gide, who was then able to publish, under separate cover, the journal he himself also kept while writing and actually finishing his own novel of the same name). Edward Yang does not seem to have made a separate film about the making of *Terrorizer*; but Godard did so, after completing his film *Passion* (1981). At any rate, the archetypal scene in Gide's intricate novel (a term he reserved for a form that marked the confluence of a number of stories, plot lines, and *recits*, and used only once in his own work, for this book) is the moment in which, during a discussion of the novelist's theories about the ways in which contemporary intellectuals counterfeit social and spiritual values, another character flings a "real" coin upon the table, suggesting that the referent itself might interest him as well. But theories about counterfeiting are more interesting to this protagonist than the reality (which belongs in fact to another of the novel's multiple plot strands). Edouard is thus himself ironically dispatched along with the other hapless characters about whom he has himself ironized. More significantly, in a move that has traditionally seemed canonical for high modernism generally, the very theme of counterfeit value is thereby itself ironized and left to float in midair and midreference, passing slowly in all its optionality from the status of a social comment or critique into that of sheer aesthetic decoration and back again.

One's sense is that modernist constructs of this kind cannot be filmed. It is a proposition that could be tested against very different candidates: Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game* [*La Regle du jeu*, 1939], for example, which has its author inside it as well (the director playing the meddling and matchmaking - "authorial" - character of Octave), along with multiple plot lines and artificial mechanisms *en abime*. The social content in which Renoir's bravura formal operation is performed is, to be sure, very different from Gide's, turning as it does on an aristocracy of blood, culture, and merit, and posing questions about heroism and about authentic loves. But if this reflexive form constitutively includes a rift between form and content, the shift in period and social class, or in ideological preoccupation, should not make any fundamental difference. More relevant, perhaps, is the glacial distance of *Rules of the Game* from even those characters about which it seems to be sentimentalizing - a gulf seemingly too broad to be spanned by Gidean (or indeed Jamesean) irony, at least in a situation in which the terms are of two distinct modes of being. The familiar sentimental complacent relationship of viewer to character is staged by way of the visual image, whereas the judgment takes place somewhere else, in a nonvisual, nonfilmic mind. Quite distinct from this is the interpenetration of empathy and otherness enabled, indeed encouraged, by narrative language in the point-of-view ironies of high modernism.

Meanwhile, Nabokov's coy and mannered version of these games does not work on film either: Fassbinder's version of *Despair* (1979), whatever its other considerable merits, is absurdly - perhaps even pointedly - unfaithful to the novel in this respect, since in the reading we are persuaded of a virtual physical identity between the narrator and his double, which is instantly dispelled by the latter's first appearance on the screen. That very different reflexivity of Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), however, in which the place of the novelist and language is taken by the apparatus itself, yields a stream of visual images whose equivalent would surely not be the introspective complacencies of a Gide, but rather the *Sachlichkeit* of a Dos Passos or a Dublin (experimental objectivities whose fit with the medium of language time has itself rendered questionable).

We must conclude, then, that the media sharply diverge in their capacity for what, to use a properly Gidean term, we may call *complicity* with the fictional conscious mimesis, mirror-stage jubilation by proxy we are capable of developing in the presence of the images of movie actors, it can have little enough to do with the games high modernist writers played on the expanding and contracting distance within the reading of the fictional sentence.

It is something that can be said, the other way round, in terms of judgment rather than of empathy, and shown on the occasion of a famous chapter in the *Counterfeiters* (Part 2, Chapter 7), in which an ostentatiously omniscient narrator now, after the fashion of the eighteenth-century novel, pretends to pass his fictional characters in review and to acknowledge their weaknesses and defects: "Edouard annoyed me more than once, and even made me indignant. . . . Lady Griffith quite impressed me in the beginning, but I quickly realized the mistake I was making. . . . Vincent interested me more..." etc., etc. One never quite believed it, yet it may seem in retrospect that Gide succeeded in fooling us with this ruse and in encouraging a habit of judgment in the reader by virtue of annoying us with his own. Such judgment tends to ratify a certain moral or personal commitment to these characters on the reader's part: liking them is certainly not the word for it (although Gide takes pains to make sure we dislike some of them), but a minimal willingness to compare the temperatures within this or that point of view, this or that subjectivity, is involved.

There is nothing of the sort in *Terrorizer*, whose characters are all signally lacking in any of the secret merits that might encourage our complicity. Nor are they, however, antipathetic, something that might be easier to achieve but that Yang does not really manage, even for the Eurasian girl (who on some accounts seems to have been for him the eponymous villain of the piece) (Figure 22). At least in my opinion, they are neither likeable nor dramatically evil, but rather mildly, and secretly, repulsive. The self-pity of the protagonist, Li Li-chung (Li Lichen), the doctor (and husband of the writer already mentioned), is not enhanced by his betrayal of a colleague (let alone his massive obtuseness about his wife's unhappiness). Chou Y5-fen, meanwhile, is so narcissistically unhappy (and so complacent in her subsequent moment of happiness and triumph) as to make it very easy to separate any feelings one may have about her victimization as a woman from one's judgment of her personality. Nor do the

protagonists of the other plot strands fare much better: the young photographer with whom the film opens (paparazzo-like, he is trying to get some action shots of a shoot-out between drug dealers and the police; Figure 23) is surely as self-centered an idle rich youth as one would like, not quite as repulsive as the hero of *Blow-up* (1966), but only because he does not have to make a living out of it. Meanwhile, his immediate target (the fleeing Eurasian girl, nicknamed the White Chick and initially mixed up with the criminal elements in question) offers yet another version of self-centered ego indulgence and narcissistic indifference to the outside world, even leaving aside her criminal nastiness and the well-nigh impersonal ferocity with which she fights for her existence in a world of rich and stupid, corrupt johns and gulls. Her mother, floating alcoholically in her memories of the 1950s nightlife among U.S. servicemen, is not much better, while the bureaucrats are appropriately repellent and the underworld flora and fauna unromantic and bestially uninteresting. To say that the policeman (he is the doctor's childhood friend) comes off the best is only to register the fact that we learn least about him and that, of all the things people do in this movie, act tired out, lie in a hot tub, do some drinking, and listen to a "younger brother's" complaints or boasts, are the least calculated to arouse antipathy.

To be sure, at the end of the chapter in question, Gide also tosses all his characters in the trash can: "If ever I find myself inventing another story, I will only allow into it tempered characters, whom life makes sharper, rather than blunting their edge. Laura, Douviers, La Perouse, Azais . . . what am I doing with people like this?" Yet it is that very standard of judgment that allows Gide to say so, which is lacking in Edward Yang's film, for reasons historical and social, rather than cultural or personal, reasons ultimately rooted in the differences between the modern period and our own.

In that separation of form and content I have already evoked, Gide's "novel" also formally exploits and organizes a social and personal content given in advance and somehow contingent on the vicissitudes of the writer's own life and background. Clearly enough, all the varied forms of a high modernist abstraction must in one way or another confront this contingent seam, which is the necessity for some minimal image content in the first place (the last sparse image residue of the Mallarmé vase or curtains blowing): it is an open question whether authenticity consists in acknowledging such contingency and allowing it to persist within the work as such, like a foreign body, or attempting a symbolic recuperation whereby at some higher level it again becomes "motivated" (in all the Russian formalist senses), and thus meaningful or postcontingent. In the event Gide does both, attempting to endow his homosexuality with symbolic meaning, while the fact of his social background in French Protestantism is taken mainly as a given and a contingent starting point. In *The Counterfeiters*, then, with its multivocal and collective formal vocation, Gide is obliged to draw on the French Protestant background far more extensively than in the individual *recits*, where the problem of individual destiny and individual choice fairly well ensures a "motivation" of the initial situation in terms of this or that meaning (whether "hedonistic," as in *L'Immoraliste*, or "ascetic," as in *La Porte étroite*). In retrospect, the Gide of *Les Faux-monnayeurs* may instructively be reread as an ethnic novelist, for whom French Protestantism uniquely, in French society, has some thing of the enclave and subcultural dynamics we associate

with ethnicity in the United States. The residues of a relatively prim and pietistic moralizing in the judgments of the omniscient narrator are then overdetermined by this particular social content: in some deeper ideological sense, Gide remains a Christian novelist, whose attention is above all focused on matters of character (in the moral sense of what can manifest rectitude and steadfastness, or weakness and irresolution). From Weber all the way to David Riesman's "inner-direction," then, these matters of characterology are social in their causes as well as in their effects: if they reinforce the emergent ethos of capitalism or, later on, the spirit of the entrepreneurial moment, such moralizing categories also remain intimately bound up with a particular stage of social development from which their judgments cannot be separated.

This is clearest for categories of evil or of moral weakness and corruption. Gide can still produce a diagnosis of the social condition and identity forces for social evil in the irresponsible and corrupt Cocteau figure of Edouard's rival novelist Passavant, and even more starkly in those genuine nihilists for whom Passavant is a kind of facade and who operate by way of genuine crime ("real" counterfeiting) and an atmosphere not unlike the anarchism and terrorism indicted by Conrad in works like *The Secret Agent*. But this Manichaeic and apocalyptic view of social disintegration is much less convincing in the radical Gide than in conservative and right-wing authors. Moral weakness, susceptibility to evil influences, corruptibility, the failure of nerve, or the sapping of moral fiber - these judgments are here more plausible, but seem applicable to almost everyone, from the corrupt grande bourgeoisie on the side of social order all the way to the various prototypes of youth - Edouard's second nephew Olivier is then momentarily seduced by Passavant, while the latter's older brother Vincent is irredeemably corrupted by the fashionable novelist and his partner Lady Griffith, whom Vincent murders in a tropical drama of madness and selfdestruction that we glimpse only fitfully between the lines.

It is enough to juxtapose these figures with the characters of *Terrorizer* to see that in postmodern times, in the international urban society of late capitalism, such moral judgments are irrelevant or at least inoperative (to use a oncefashionable corporate word). Gidean moralism, and the monitory portraits of evil and corruption it enables, can have little to do with the maimed figures of the Taiwanese film, if only because it presupposes what the various poststructuralisms most often call the "centered subject," the old inner-directed ego of the modern period. In a postmodern universe, after the "death of the subject," or at least after the end of the "ideology of the subject" as such, it follows that nobody is evil any longer either, exactly, or at least that that is no longer the word for it: in this film, the Eurasian girl ' and her pimp are dangerous and violent (we witness, for example, the - not unjustified - murder of one of her clients), but given the context of urban capitalism, they are surely not much worse than anybody else. Indeed, I would argue that within the prodigious expansion of the concept of rationality in our contemporary postnatural society (taking rationality in the Habermassian sense of what one can understand or argue for), the traditional antonyms of this concept - the irrational, madness, and even evil itself - have become increasingly implausible or unfunctional. The occult revival, the taste for demonology, strikes one as a desperate or

nostalgic attempt to pump life back into these moral conceptions, which remain as quaint and inappropriate in the postcontemporary period as Victorian bustles at a disco.

But already in *The Counterfeiters* crime and violence had begun to secure a somewhat different narrative function from that of moralizing judgments: in a system of parallel narrative strands, indeed, violence and crime tend to mark an "ultimately determining instance" in which the various plots come together in an explosive climax. But this is narrative rather than ontological logic, so to speak, and bears less on the ultimate meaning and interpretation of the events in question than on their visibility and their eruption as symptoms to be read. So the police investigation of counterfeiting and vice ("crimes roses") continues throughout the surface unfolding of the final sections of the novel, but the conspiracy finds its surface inscription in the related schoolboy prank whereby the student Boris shoots himself in front of his class under his grandfather's eyes.

In *Terrorizer*, meanwhile, the criminal incident - the shoot-out - stands at the starting point of the intrigue, as what accidentally links a group of destinies together: in particular, the occasion that lets the young photographer glimpse the Eurasian girl (whom he photographs). In film, however, crosscutting can just as plausibly connect these plot strands with others, with which they have not yet concretely intersected. Thus, the doctor drives 'to work through traffic that contains both the police vans going the other way and the ambulance that carries the wounded girl to treatment: it is a connection the camera makes for us long before the effects show up in his own life. Here at any rate violence has come to be associated with narrative rather than ethical categories, and is a matter of closure or of the interrelationship of strands and episodes rather than of judgment and evaluation.

We have not yet, however, identified the positive term in Gide's moralism, which knows an equally instructive evolution and displacement in the postmodern period. This surely has to do with youth - equally an emphasis in *Terrorizer*, although its omnipresence as a theme in media culture means that it need no longer be a marked term - and the accompanying ethical conceptions of character and characterological weakness (as well as Gide's own characteristic staging of pederasty as a pedagogical matter) make it clear that it is the residual or Goethean value of *Bildung*, or "formation," that is here foregrounded in a novel whose polyphony excludes the older *Bildungsroman* form as such. It is in the light of the residual concerns of *Bildung* alone that the Gidean attention to weakness and corrupting influences can properly be understood; the juxtaposition with *Terrorizer*, however, shows that, despite the omnipresence of the "post" category of the generation here as everywhere else in postmodern global urban culture, categories of *Bildung* or pedagogy, ideals of character formation, are peculiarly inappropriate. Education manuals like the *Cortegiano* or the *Mirror for Princes* might well be imagined for the world system of late capitalism, but they surely would bear little resemblance to the traditional models; meanwhile, the very notion of reinventing a form of Goethean *Bildung* consistent with the age of Andy Warhol or MTV is problematical to say the least. Our Wilhelm Meister is called *Falsche Bewegung*, and current debates about pedagogy and the humanities in the superstate give some idea, by way of their very

aimlessness and utter intellectual vacuousness, of the difficulties involved in papering over the reification of consciousness in late capitalism, and indeed in reconciling the ravages left by the triumph of cynical reason and commercial media or corporate culture within any of the canonical or traditional moral and educational paradigms.

What has come to replace this kind of characterological focus is, rather, as *Terrorizer* shows, a displacement from the ethical and the pedagogical-formative toward the psychological as allegory or symptom of the mutilation of individual subjects by the system itself. It is an allegory that finds its most intense embodiment in the situations of women in this film, whose centrality can be measured against their relatively secondary position in Gide's *Counterfeiters*. There, Taure and Lady Griffith clearly mark the extremes of passive victimization and manipulative domination respectively; and in retrospect Gide's sense of the crippling effects of bourgeois marriage is as vivid and as critical as any of his more dramatic protests in the name of youth (which in any case were also accompanied by a denunciation of the bourgeois family). But as we shall see in more detail later, in *Terrorizer* it is the women's destinies - the situations of imprisonment of Chou Yii-fen and the Eurasian girl - which are paradigmatic, and that of the hapless Li Li-chung which is merely reactive. It is a historical difference that can perhaps best be marked by a shift in the object of the sociocultural critique: in both periods, that of the first classical feminism around World War I, of social democracy and the suffragette movement, of Shaw and Virginia Woolf, like that of the "second wave" of feminism from the late 1960s onward, attention to specific forms of injustice or oppression is articulated with a larger project of social change. But in the first period, which was still Gide's, it is in terms of a specifically bourgeois culture of the family and of middle-class Victorian hypocrisy and puritanism that both feminism and socialism are staged. In our own postmodern world, it is no longer a bourgeois or class-specific culture that is thereby indicted, but rather a system-specific phenomenon, the various forms that reification and commandification and the corporate standardizations of media society imprint on human subjectivity and existential experience. This is the sense in which *Terrorizer's* characters - most particularly the film's women characters - dramatize the maiming of the subject in late capitalism or, in terms of the language of the centered subject referred to earlier, the failure of the subject to constitute itself in the first place under the new system.

Yet all this merely characterizes the variable content organized by a form about which one wants principally to know how it will then itself be historically altered by modifications in the social raw material that is its enabling pretext. For the Gidean project - the novel as a multiplicity of plot strands - presumably survives and persists in *Terrorizer*, with the difference (of degree, rather than of kind) that the urban framework is here intensified and becomes something like the primary message of the narrative form itself. Yet in its earliest forms (as in the Byzantine novel), the providential plot, based on the coincidence of multiple destinies interweaving, was not particularly urban in its spatial requirements. The following authorial complaint, by Manzoni, is indeed a standard trope of the form well up to the twentieth century:

More than once I have seen a nice, bright little boy - somewhat too bright, to tell the truth, but showing every sign of intending to turn out a good citizen - doing his best, as evening falls, to round up his little herd of guinea-pigs, which have been running free all day in the garden. He would like to get them all trotting into the pen together; but that's hopeless. One breaks away to the right, and while the small swineherd runs after him to chase him back with the others, another one - or two, or three - dash off to the left - or all over the place. After a little impatience he adapts himself to their methods, and begins by pushing inside those who happen to be nearest to the pen, and goes to fetch the others, singly, or two or three at a time, as best he can. We have to play much the same game with our characters. We managed to get Lucia under cover, and ran off after Don Rodrigo, and now we must drop him and catch up with Renzo, who is right out of sight.⁶

If the urban comes to predominate, it is because the inns and highroads in which the protagonists of the older novel meet by accident and rectify their mistaken identities necessarily require such characters to be travelers with destinies of a specific type - exiles, runaways, pursued or pursuers, so that the plot itself is always molded according to a distinct subgenre of narrative type. The city frees all this up: its chance meetings and coincidences allow for a far greater variety of character-destinies, and thereby a web of relationships that can be spread out and unfolded in a dazzling array of distinct ideological effects. Gide's novel must properly be assigned to a specific historical trans-European generic context I am tempted to identify (anachronistically) as the Edwardian SMS. To this it is instructive (besides its strong form in books like Forster's *Howards End*) to add Virginia Woolf, on the one hand, and *Ulysses*, on the other, both of which seem different when they are read as works in a preexisting formal project, namely that of uniting classical closed plot with the spatial multiplicity of the new industrial city.

Gide's novel outrumps these in its manipulation of representational levels: where the *mise-en-abyme* of cognate narratives necessarily had to pass through the needle's eye of gossip or the orally transmitted anecdote, the eavesdropping omniscience of third parties, and the pathos of missed encounters that might have changed everything, Gide's narrative includes the journal as an innerworldly object that, opened up and read by our initial hero, Bernard (something of a false start, this young man, who solves his problems and ceases to interest the narrator), now allows the past to enter like a fourth dimension within an absolute unity of time from which the ineptitude of the psychological flashback is rigorously excluded for formal and aesthetic reasons. I would be willing to argue that we do not like to shift textual levels and are most reluctant to shift reading gears in order to scan interpolated texts and lengthy quotes inserted like a foreign body into unrelated discourse. How Gide's interpolation, which spans three chapters and some fifty pages, negotiates this particular reef is then a crucial issue, although the remarkable timing with which Gide deploys it and knows when to break it off is as much a matter of tact as anything else. That longer reading was, however, prepared by a briefer rereading of his own journal by Edouard himself, on the boat-train returning to Paris. That his own voice - that of a major, if not the principal, protagonist - prolongs the second installment of the journal

read by Bernard is surely not without its relationship to the smoothness of the transition, the relatively painless immersion in the newer textual level. Emerging from it, however, is the matter of the great narrative peripeties: guilty interruptions, eavesdropping behind doors followed by dramatic entries - the stuff of melodrama that can here exceptionally be reinvented, in a nonmelodramatic way, on the occasion of multileveled textual reflexivity. Meanwhile, once the deeper conspiratorial network that unites all these destinies without the full knowledge of any single one of them is laid in place, the more conventional chance meetings, and accounts of yet further chance meetings, forecasts, projected trajectories through the city that are bound to cross other pathways we already know of, along with the finding of abandoned notes and the overhearing of secret instructions - all these well-worn devices serve to lift and rotate the gleaming polyhedron of the new form before our eyes in ways that confirm it as a unified object and exhibit the unforeseeable glitter of its unexpected facets.

It will have thereby become clear that however film expects to achieve analogous effects, it cannot do so simply by finding and matching simple filmic equivalents to these textual ones of reading and its inner analogues. The reason has already been indicated in passing, and it is not a consequence of the deficiencies of film as a medium but rather of its superiority to narrative language in any number of representational ways. Winner loses: what makes up the plenitude of the filmic image at any instant in its narrative trajectory also secures in advance, without any supplementary work, the sheer fact of transition. The novel, and language itself - whose fundamental property is lack and a deployment of essentially absent objects - has to do a great deal of energetic footwork to crosswire its plots in a plausible yet properly unexpected manner: mesmerized by the shift to a new series of filmic images, no less full and absorbing than the preceding ones, the viewer of film is only feebly tempted to raise the ever-fainter question of the motivation for such transitions. Form has to be felt as the solution to an intractable form problem. Indeed, Eisenstein's theory and practice of montage can be instructively estranged and reread not as a solution to certain existing problems of filmic narration, but as a stubborn attempt to produce the problems as such in all their aesthetic and ontological severity - problems for which his own conception of montage was then only too ready and willing to provide a henceforth satisfying "solution."

Terrorizer achieves, or reinvents, something of this by way of unique temporal overlaps that reach their climax at the end of the film, like vibrations separated from one another in time that gradually become simultaneous. The overlaps are then fastened together, one does not want to say with Lacanian tacking nails, exactly, but by recurrent leitmotifs, a term redolent of Wagner or Thomas Mann, that is also a little too modernist-traditional; let us call these, which look like images but serve as crossroads and roundhouses of various kinds, reversible signifiers. Two of these signifiers - the gas tank and the barking dog - become inscribed in the opening sequence (but like all true repetition, they do not take on their functionality, their dreary sense of only too predictable familiarity, until that second time, which for repetition as a phenomenon is really always a first). The shoot-out, as we have said, is not important in itself, but rather serves as a

detonator for the other plot lines. What is more significant is that it takes place at first light, that first vacancy of the city in early morning that will gradually be filled in by characters, business, and routines of all kinds. Violent death first thing in the morning: we do not know whose body it is, except that it is the pretext for the young photographer to look for a scoop and the occasion for him to glimpse the White Chick as she climbs out a balcony window and injures her leg. At that point, as the camera now sets off to follow her flight, we reach another reversible signifier, a somehow less reified one, since it enfolds relationships rather than a static thing in a recurrent static place. This is the zebra crossing at which she collapses, but which will then accompany a shot of her legs at various stages of her recovery, framed by crutches, and then healed again and jaunty, ready to go about her predatory business.

The sirens may include the ambulance that takes her away, but they certainly include the police vans, which give us a glimpse of Taipei's morning rush hour at high tide and also intersect another plot line as their wail rises to the apartment in which the doctor, Li Li-chung, can be observed about his stretching exercises on the balcony. (In another moment, we will see him driving to work in the morning traffic, perhaps passing the police car carrying his childhood friend away from the incident, perhaps crossing the Eurasian girl's ambulance on its way to the hospital). His immediate superior has just died; he stands in line for advancement and is full of high hopes, particularly since he has taken the trouble to denounce the malpractice of his only rival (otherwise, or hitherto, a friend and colleague). He also has marital problems; his wife's writing block (of which we have spoken) makes life at home unpleasant, as she wonders whether she should go back to work at her old job in the publishing house (run by a former lover, with whom she later renews the affair), indeed, whether she should leave her husband altogether (which she does later on that day). Meanwhile, something of Li Li chung's character is conveyed by yet another signifier, the compulsive motif of his handwashing, which he accomplishes in well-nigh surgical fashion (scrubbing all the way up the lower arm) and only gradually, with repetition, turns into a mania reenacted with every new entry into an interior space (his own apartment, that of others, hotel rooms, workplace, etc.), betokening his extraordinary inner security or "inferiority complex." The handwashing thus comes to stand for the problematic balance between public and private (career and marriage, job and home) and will eventually participate in something even more dramatic, as we shall see.

The hour of repetition meanwhile sounds for the scene of the crime when the would-be paparazzo, time weighing heavily on his hands, decides to rent and inhabit the now-empty murder apartment. Now we see the gas tank in all its splendor (this; is evidently a well-known Taipei eyesore about whose dangerous emplacement' in the midst of a heavily residential area there has been much public debate):⁷ everything stylistically extraordinary about *Terrorizer* is already concentrated in this initial geographical move and choice of urban setting - the brilliant color of a dramatic shape that is also a depressing sign of urban squalor, a science fictional profile associated with the humdrum misery of lower-middleclass life; something like a structural inversion of magic realism is to be found here, in this utterly nonmagical and unsurrealistic photographic transformation of urban detail into solid colors whose stunning combinations are somehow

chilled by the perfection of the technological apparatus and strike the viewer with that distance and coldness I have already mentioned.

Here also, the barking dog; in Taiwan, city dogs are often kept in cages, which makes for something of an auditory leitmotiv. This one binds us into a recurrent space (it will later on be visited by the novelist as a result of her "anonymous phone call"), and at least subliminally begins to sensitize us to the situation of imprisonment as such, which will undergo a remarkable phenomenological transformation in this film. Indeed, it already begins to do its work of identification and association (the interiors of dwellings are the same as prison cells) in the motive for the move itself, for another domestic quarrel, first thing in the morning, is also virtually simultaneous with the shoot-out and Li Li-chung's exercises - it is the breakup of the photographer and his girlfriend, who appreciates the photos of the Eurasian girl even less than the early morning sorties after fire engines and the like. The older apartment is sealed within blowing curtains; the boyfriend's films and stills are trashed (as in an earlier representation of the media); she throws him out and tries to commit suicide, and is then rushed to the hospital in a way that does not particularly generate sympathy for her, but raises all kinds of *nouveau roman* questions: Is it the same hospital as the one Li Li-chung himself works in? Was the White Chick treated here as well? What is the meaning of this urban simultaneity in the multinational system today, where it evidently has a rather different effect than the great village network constructed by the paths of Joyce's characters through familiar downtown sites in *Ulysses*?

As for the photographer, it should be noted that he shares with all the other characters what may be described as a time of dead transition, a temporality, not so much of waiting as of sitting it out dully: the doctor waiting for his promotion; his writer-spouse waiting for inspiration, or else to change her life completely; the White Chick waiting for her leg to heal and the cast to come off. Such characters are peculiarly condemned to a marking of time that lacks joyousness or eager anticipation, since (paradoxically in the first two cases) the outcome is not particularly appetizing, something assuredly the case for the young photographer, since he is merely waiting to do his military service. All this for him is then mere interim, a peculiar furlough from life, and his emotional life is thereby equally affected, as witness the whim of a fantasy life in the drug dealers' apartment, or even the passion for the White Chick herself, whose enormously enlarged photographic image is hung in segments on the apartment wall, in the hermetically sealed space of what is used as a darkroom, beyond the world and beyond Taipei.

At this point, then, what begins to focus our attention and our curiosity is no longer the simultaneity of the four independent plot strands (involving the doctor, the writer, the photographer, the Eurasian girl), so much as how they can eventually be expected to intersect and intertwine in that tying up of all the knots that is as much an implicit formal expectation of this practice of multiple plots as is their significantly named denouement. In *Terrorizer*, however, what may be called the event of the narrative vinculum is repeated on two levels virtually simultaneously, in a superposition that makes it realist and modernist all at once: rehearsing the great realist trope of authorial omniscience (what we see along with the author as the characters themselves remain ignorant) and then trumping it with the

autoreflexivity characteristic of the modernist period and one of its obsessive thematic and formal mannerisms. The Eurasian girl in her literal confinement (the mother locks her in when she goes out at night to work) begins to make phone calls, with greater and greater abandon, picking names out of the phone book and inventing nasty stories to tell the unknown people who pick up on the other end. Presumably, for Edward Yang, this modern equivalent of the poison-pen letter (dear to the classical English detective story and a kind of symbol of what most unerringly undermines the calm of tribal or village social relations) entitles her to the eponymous characterization more than anything associated with garden-variety prostitution or murder: it marks a peculiar intensity of *ressentiment* that is surely not unrelated to her socially marginal status and to the exclusion of half-breeds from traditional Chinese society (as from most other traditional ones). In the present context, however, it is just as significant that the genes mark the presence of U.S. servicemen and U.S. empire in this hitherto Japanese colony, only recently recolonized by the mainland Kuomintang (Guomintang) (an aspect of colonization that has been extensively dramatized by Hou Hsiao-hsien, particularly in *City of Sadness*, while the U.S. residual effects have been more openly registered in Edward Yang's work, particularly in the forthcoming, and significantly titled, *A Brighter Summer Day*).

One of these venomous, but anonymous fictional shafts strikes the writer Chou YO-fen, who then thinks she has learned about her husband's adulteries and feels herself thereby all the more empowered to go about living her own independent life: indeed, like a peculiarly reversible toxin, this liberates her from her writer's block and sets her working again. Finally, the interrupted phone call had advised her, for further information, to visit an address that is none other than the murder apartment, in which, as we know, the photographer has now taken up abode and to which the White Chick will also slowly make her way, since she still has the key and is feverish and in some desperation after the catastrophic outcome of her attempt at free-lance prostitution (undertaken when her leg is healed and she can finally escape the mother's jail sentence).

What kicks these interesting coincidences up another level into a more reflexive kind of storytelling discourse - as I have already indicated, their equivalents can be found all the way back to the Greek novel, via *Tom Jones* and any number of other classical adventure or picaresque texts- is obviously the redoubling of the narrative in written form, *en abyme*, as my references to Gide will already have begun to foretell. The reader will indeed scarcely be surprised to learn that the story Chou Yii-fen has finally been freed to write is a kind of modified alternative world in which her husband has an affair with someone not terribly unlike the White Chick herself and in which a wife, who is a writer, is thereby freed to write another story, one that in real life wins her a prize and catapults her onto the cultural page of the major newspapers, not to speak of the television screen. But this puts a very different face on narrative coincidence, which it now refashions, as from over a great distance, into patterns and shapes as abstract as the traces of mound builders' culture seen from a satellite, or the Himalayas seen from the moon: from an intention to reunite and reassemble, which can at best be attributed to Providence (when such a concept is available), the narrative intersections become reformed into demiurgic games played by the aesthetic great Other of romantic irony (aesthetics now here, for

the modems as well as the Romantics, coming to replace fate, chance, and ethics). Equally clearly, however, this quintessentially modernist turn and flavor are all the more identifiable as such because they bring an old-fashioned note into the postmodern context, which can be charming or jarring indifferently, depending on whether the ambitions of modern form bring some relief from postmodern frivolity or whether the implacable ideological stress of the modern on the aestheticity of life, and on the implicit but inescapable role of the individual genius, are now relatively intolerable. Later on, however, I will show that yet a third interpretation of *Terrorizer* can be called on to dispel the modernist appearance in its turn and reaffirm its postcontemporaneous relevance (if not exactly its postmodernity).

Even if for a moment we retain the modernist framework that Chou Yii-fen's novella establishes, it should be added that its transmission by way of the medium of film seriously problematizes the modernist effects that should accompany it, or at the very least renders them optional in what we will later on see to be a postmodern way. Nothing is more alien to this film, indeed, than the mystical-modernist overtones of the theme of inspiration from without, as when, in Cocteau's film of the same name, Orpheus copies down his poetry from enigmatic messages transmitted over the car radio like Resistance code broadcasts ("Les carottes sont cuites, trois fois!"); nor is the book itself (in its previous incarnation we heard only a few vapid samples of nature lyricism) anything like an Yi Jing, which, as in Dick's *Man in the High Castle*, one consults for forecasts of individual and collective history alike. For one thing it is not clear who in the film has actually read this prize-winning production: the photographer and the girlfriend (with whom he is eventually reunited) hear about it on television and then read a summary in the newspaper. As for her most important reader (or so one would have thought), the husband does not read at all, something of an index of his general obtuseness, as the following snatch of dialogue suggests:

HOSPITAL DIRECTOR (with some suspicion)

What does your wife do exactly? What are these things she writes anyway?

LI LI-CHUNG (evasively)

Oh, I don't know. I don't read novels.

The novel thereby comes before us not as an object or an alternative world or narrative, but rather as a peculiarly disembodied effect, with all the reality and objectivity of sheer appearance: it is error made real and having taken on, flesh; it is, as it were, the image-for-the-other, the simulacrum or a simulacrum, since the viewer never apprehends it directly but only by way of the judgments of the other characters (in this case the photographer, who recognizes the writer's picture as his mysterious visitor and suddenly grasps all this as the machinations of his equally mysterious Eurasian acquaintance). If, now, however, we reposition this effect within what we might as well call the Hansen-Bordwell hypothesis, writing at once takes on the status of one medium among others, competing for power and prestige with the more modern technologies of photography, sound transmission (here the telephone, although more normally the radio), and finally film itself. It should be evident that if Yang's movie camera retains the ultimate priority

over all the other media, if only by virtue of the fact that they are necessarily represented within it, it nonetheless plays fair and endows each of them with a specific power not ordinarily thought to be consistent with cinemas as such.

For photography within film seems to retain what Walter Benjamin might have called an archaic aura, a dimly threatening primitive power, as when stills of the murder victims silently circulate among the police team, who thereby see and are present in ways denied the moviegoer even when the still is flashed on the screen for us in passing. In *Terrorizer*, to be sure, the photographer proves to be an idle rich youth with a hobby, and the emphasis is placed as much on the cash value of his various cameras as on the quality of his images (Figure 24), save for the one mesmerizing shot of the White Chick peering fearfully around a corner, unaware that she is in the process of being seen and recorded. This is the magnified image, three times greater than life and developed in segments of glossy prints, that will greet her eyes as she returns to the murder room: an allegory of film itself? Perhaps, but if so, only because, like the punctum in the fatal photographs of Antonioni's *Blow-up*, and unlike Rimbaud's magical flowers or Lacan's signifiers, this one does not look back at you. Here the wind that blows through the great trees in Antonioni's park only more mildly lifts and ruffles the segments of the portrait. Photography's prestige, here, is to be equal to the simulacrum and more interesting than the reality, but otherwise little more than a way of killing time.⁸

Perhaps we need to drive a wedge more dramatically between the senses, after the great synesthesias of the modern period, and to restore some of the liberating freshness and horror of the auditory image in a society that has become one immense collection of visual spectacles.⁹ This is then perhaps the deeper meaning of the sequence whereby *Blow-up*'s postmodern sequels - De Palma's *Blowout* (1981) and Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974) - transfer the visible clue to the realm of sound: the unconscious, utopian longing to be awakened from the spell of images, and to be awakened by sounds as piercing as shots or whispers? The White Chick is at any rate a good deal more threatening on the phone than in her image, and the spider's web of anonymous phone calls all over the city offers a vivid figure for urban simultaneity, as well as for the misery of confinement and powerlessness: as with Stalin or Hitler in their offices, it is hard to tell supreme power from house arrest, and something of the mystery of the definitive embodiment of psychic resources in technology - what was human reality like before the telephone? before the photograph? before the mirror? - is here recovered from the forgetfulness into which the triumph of these media plunges being itself. But telephonic relief also returns us to the specific form of organization of this particular city.

As for literature, it surely fares least well of all the modes we have come to recognize as mediatic: wrong on all counts, a vehicle for narcissism and selfpity, and for the shabby pride of commercialized prizes, a shabby cultural alibi in the destiny of the most ancient of all literate civilizations on its way to television like everybody else. Significantly, here alone television rears its garish competing likenesses: in this rivalry between the arts and media (which film is in any case slated to win in advance), it is important that the small screen humiliate high culture, but not enter into too distracting a juxtaposition with film, whose brilliant capacities are so extraordinarily rehearsed. (In the era of

video, someone once remarked, film recovers that aura that Benjamin had denied it in the era of its undisputed technological mastery. Is this not to say that there is something slightly old-fashioned today about the exercise of bravura cinematography, which is, in any case, as I have already observed, an icy mastery?)

All of this marks something like the content of the form; and it is important, in my opinion, to be clear about the competing interpretations that force their way through even to this level and persist in their struggle for it. The features we have just evoked, which reach their thematic climax with the novella and its relationship to a world already structured by the other media, can all be read in conjunction as a vivid contemporary replay of that modern-romantic topos of fiction and reality, the dream world, illusion and what it transfigures; indeed, *Terrorizer* would helpfully bring all that up to date and place such topics back on a postcontemporary agenda. Yet such a reading turns the film back into a set of conceptual meanings, into a vehicle for certain thoughts or reflections, or for a kind of philosophy of life - rather old-fashioned commodities in the universal sway of positivism and "cynical reason," and of the "end" of just such "ideologies." To this technocratization of philosophy, then, corresponds the transformation of the genres into the media, along with the emergence of readings such as the one sketched earlier (the deeper subject of the film consisting in its articulated rivalry with competing media). It is a *Gestalt* alternation we will observe on other levels (and in particular on that of the "form of the content"); it is perhaps most productive to use it for a degree of historical self-knowledge and to observe the plausibility with which each option comes before us respectively. The deeper "meaning" of the film, in that case, would not lie in either interpretation but in our hesitation between both.

As for the psychic content of the work, that constructed effect - that "unspeakable" narrative or filmic "sentence" - whereby a structure of synchronous monadic simultaneities seems to demand embodiment in someone's experience, if only that of God himself, is now, with the final looping of the knots, ever more suggestively passed off as this or that subjective experience. The shock we may attribute to the Eurasian girl is just such a formal "objective correlative," for it releases the multitudinous occult traditions of the *Doppelgänger* and its putative terrors - myself striding forth to meet me at midday! - at the same time it mobilizes a whole contemporary philosophy of the Look (from Sartre on down), and the way in which it endows me with an external being that is alien to me, but to which I am also condemned. The association of these motifs with narrative now has the advantage of dispelling philosophical or theosophic connotations. And not only with narrative, but with a reflexive positing of narrative in which, in writers like Gide, it is less important to produce a plot than to produce the idea of plot itself, as an object in its own right that, lacking totality, gradually disengages itself from all its local manifestations and hovers above the completed work as its visionary mirror image in the realm of objective spirit. The experience is as simple as it is unsettling: others have been seeing me without my knowing it! Others whose existences I was not even aware of have been thinking about me! At the level of urban simultaneities on which we now find ourselves, this - what are you doing with my picture? - is a virtual *cognito*, the punctual other end of all those mutually exclusive synchronicities. It is a paradox that will then, from now until the final image, continue to be turned inside out ceaselessly like

Benjamin's famous socks,¹⁰ for its sharpness is the same as Chou Y0-fen's blissful ignorance of the origins in other, unknown people of the story she believes to be autobiographical, while Li Li-chung's knowledge (the photographer puts him in the picture and shows him the photos) is as numbing a form of distraction as his other worries and as unproductive, leading to what may be called externalized, or "foreclosed,"¹¹ impersonal hallucinations, rather than to any shocked presentiment of unexpected worlds beyond his own.

It is to be sure about Li Li-chung's experience and about his psyche that *Terrorizer* raises the most durable questions: in this polyvocal film without a hero a certain priority seems gradually to be afforded to this one, whose destiny promises to hold the key to interpretation most reliably as the actions draw to a close. But it may be a broken promise: Li Li-chung loses out on his promotion, as we might have guessed, and as we know, he loses his wife as well. In both cases he tries aimlessly to salvage the situation with clumsy efforts that confirm our initial impression of this character as the quintessential loser - something we can tell virtually from his very first appearance, doing exercises on his balcony (although I would be hard put to say why or how). I have suggested that we can have little personal sympathy for him (a remark about which there can be nothing "personal" since it also holds for all the other characters as well), yet his destiny can awaken a certain impersonal sadness, and this identifies, I believe, the allegorical investment in the figure of Li Li-chung. He, more than any of the other characters (the traditional policeman, the Western-style modernist writer, specimens of a timeless *jeunesse doree*, lumpens who have their equivalent in every urban center on the globe), can serve as evidence for an unconscious (and collective) meditation on dependency, that is to say, on the positioning of the national entity within the new world system of late capitalism. As a technocrat and a bureaucratized professional, indeed, Li Li-chung is well placed to offer figuration to the "national allegory"¹² of a post-Third World country that can never really join the First World (in the sense of capital export and becoming a new center of the world system, which it would do only as a structural satellite of Japan or the United States). His "brilliant career" is significantly accompanied not by dramatic and tragic failures, but by prospects that, even if successful, are not likely to modify the dreariness of his current prosperity. One does not, in other words, foresee a more gratifying continuation of this marriage, nor, if the other bureaucrats are any indication, would the coveted promotion be likely to transform him, in a thunderclap, in his very being. This - the joylessness of good fortune in the global bureaucratic system - is perhaps the new face of a dependency most often dramatized in terms of tendential improvement and the "development of underdevelopment." This is, as it were, the gentrified dimension of a postmodernity whose flip side is neopoverty and "homelessness" and a, whole new attitude toward urban space also registered in this film in original ways.

From this class standpoint, indeed, in a developing or underdeveloped country, the fate of the petite bourgeoisie (in this stage, a new petite bourgeoisie or professional-managerial segment of bureaucrats and formerly independent professionals) seems to be more generally emblematic of the fate of the nation or the collectivity, at least in the popular imagination: Balzac, who wrote in a roughly comparable period of France's

development, often projects his petite bourgeois figures in this way, as allegories of the national misery. It is as though the rich and successful (in our time, multinational executives) are lucky in some private and nongeneralizable way, while the poor - particularly agricultural and manual workers - are already universally exploited anyway and can scarcely be allegorical of anything save the perennity of class struggle itself. In some situations, to be sure, lumpens - like the *picaros* of the Spanish golden age - can also be allegorical of the nation, while the sadness we have attributed to the figure of Li Li-chung can be thought to include all the mixed feelings attributable to the developing Third World. He could not be allegorical of Taiwan exactly, for many other unique determinants of that special situation are omitted from his story; but his fate may at least be seen as a figural acting out of fantasies about the limits to Taiwanese development in a world system. What such an interpretation does to the potential universality of such a narrative, and in particular to its relevance to and reception by First World audiences, will be the topic of a concluding reflection.

But it would be a mistake to assimilate "national allegory" in this new post-modern sense to the traditional or stereotypical view of this structure as a supremely static and mechanical one. There is, in postcontemporary allegory, a kind of inner, self-transcending dynamic for which even the older word "reflexive" is too weak, a self-regulating transformation of such organisms under their own momentum in which initial figures are ceaselessly and dialectically modified by virtue of the very fact that in them the problem of representation is itself already thematized, and must therefore produce and reproduce itself in a variety of new guises and levels.

So here the seemingly colorless drama of Li Li-chung develops in unforeseeably dramatic ways that would seem to have little enough to do with the revelation of the story within a story, the anonymous interventions and self-reflexive modernist and conspiratorial rewritings that were the burden of his wife's narrative line. Those come only to compound the doctor's general confusion and to separate him, in his dejection, even more completely from real life. There follows what is surely one of the most astonishing scenes in recent cinema, in which Li Li-chung revisits his childhood friend the policeman and makes a remarkable announcement: beaming with joy, he explains that he has finally won his promotion, that he has also been able to come to terms with his wife's departure and to realize that he is better off without her, that he is a happy man at last - successful, at peace with himself, fulfilled. The gestural and physiognomic euphoria with which these falsehoods are conveyed transcends the usual signs of mendacity or simply lying (if only because we can see no point to the deception, so that our own confusion washes back over the effect to intensify it). It is difficult to convey the terrible joy, the radiantly false happiness, that streams in effulgence from the ghastly smile of a character who has rarely smiled before and with whom we have come to associate the furrowed brow of an essentially plodding man meeting his difficulties with uniform perplexity and without skill. The heightened expression, not registered in close-up, is projected off the screen in a way only comparable (although the content is altogether different) to that supreme *oeillade* in *Mr. Arkadin* (1955) where the zoom shot of the bearded Welles's sharp return look shows that he knows, and that he knows we know, and so forth. *Supreme* is the

climactic word one wants for this kind of thing in which the event pulls itself up by its own pigtail into a higher, formally transcendent level.

As for Li Li-chung's supreme happiness, modernist readings can still be imagined for it, as in the Nietzschean-fictional suggestion that under certain circumstances the acting out of alternative, unrealized possibilities - sealed by my celebration with the brother, the ritual of festive eating and drinking, enjoyment of my new esteem, having lived up to expectations at last - might be as satisfying, perhaps more fully satisfying, than the reality. The interpretation in terms of life and art would here continue to find corroboration and plausibility, but should be complemented by a reading of what I will only for convenience sake call a relatively more postmodern type. After all, in retrospect, one of the fundamental signs of an impending change in our mode of thinking consists in the increasing dissatisfaction with what I have elsewhere called the "depth model"¹³ - in this, the opposition between life and fiction modeled roughly on some notion of a reality behind or opposed to an appearance. What took the place of that appearance-and-reality model was something variously characterized in terms of textuality or in terms of practices, a conception of the succession of various surfaces, none of which was somehow metaphysically or ontologically privileged over the other. But that Li Li-chung's fictional or unreal alternative life can also be seen and read in this way is shown by a remarkable series of multiple and mutually exclusive denouements.

In another early-morning sequence, after their late-night celebration, the husband-physician awakens in the policeman's house and removes the sleeping man's revolver; assassinates the hospital director on his way to work; and then, breaking into the apartment of his wife's lover, shoots the lover in gruesome execution style. Unable to do the same to his wife, he stations himself in the crowded downtown area in which we have seen the White Chick pick up her victims, and waits for her, presumably because he has seen her photograph and has decided to hold her responsible for all his troubles. But by now we know that both of these hitherto absolutely unrelated characters are very dangerous: the final plot loop, whether involving sexual intercourse or murder, is a putative climax of great tension and instability whose narrative satisfactions, even granting the tying up of the last remaining threads, are no longer clear. But now time runs more swiftly: the policeman wakes suddenly; the pimp who classically follows the couple down the hotel corridor unexpectedly finds himself locked out of the room; the police come pounding down the hall; and at the same moment, we observe the protagonist characteristically, preparatory to anything else, wash his hands extensively one final time. But this time the motif has been activated: the liquid splashing out of the faucet coincides with the splintering of the hotel room door as the police break in. What results, however, is the splattering of blood and brain tissue over a different wall, in a different space, as Li Li-chung shoots himself in the early morning in the bathhouse of his friend's building, at which point the wife suddenly wakes up in her lover's flat, staring with wide eyes at an unidentified premonition.

It will have been obvious, from all the conventional aesthetic signals, that the preceding sequence was a fantasy or wish fulfillment of some kind. Nor do I mean to argue against the obvious either but rather to urge the return of a certain indecidability to the

sequence itself, whose remarkable loop - the water faucet reappearing with all the portentous formal significance of Freudian *Nachtraglichkeit* (retroactivation or "deferred action") - arrests us in its own right by its striking narrative temporality, without our being able to determine the presence of any specific content or message as such. It is rather a kind of prestidigitation in which we watch the abstract fillip of the form itself and are thereby distracted from the content, and in particular are released from the tiresome (realistic) obligation of deciding whether it is supposed to be real or to be a dream of some kind.

Indeed, this multiple ending is in my opinion very delicately balanced, carefully arranged so that such decisions can be eluded, if not avoided altogether. Its skillfulness cannot really be appreciated unless we are willing to acknowledge how tiresome the interpolation form of the flashback or the fantasy has become in recent years; they were staples of the older cinema, and knew a kind of Indian summer in the era of film noir, immediately after World War II (and immediately before the wide screen, the end of Hollywood, and the senescence of modernism itself). The framed narrative has always carried the message of fate, of sealed destinies, of events irredeemably past. The interpolated filmic (and less often, literary) daydream also probably served to reinforce the sense of imprisonment in my current situation; indeed, if Bierce's "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" can be taken as the fusion and synthesis of both, their symbolic value - in the instants before a capital execution - becomes dramatically explicit. Stylized revivals of the technique - as in Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) - would seem even more explicitly to enlist the unreal interpolated narrative segment in order to drive home the collective imprisonment of a 1984-type society. But for postcontemporary viewers, the traditional frame, which asks us to leave the present, to which predictably we will return only at the end of the film - as, for example, in *Le Jour se leve* (1939) - is evidently irritating in direct proportion to our systemic commitment to a postmodern present, while the Hollywood fantasy narrative vainly tries to substitute alternative reality satisfactions in ways that equally try our patience.

The alternate endings of *Terrorizer*, however, do not require heavy subjectification; the film is over too fast, and its polyphony, the multiplicity of protagonists, leaves it entangled with their destinies in ways impossible to sort out (our last view of the Eurasian girl, for example, which thereby continues to carry a certain informational authority). Meanwhile, if it was a fantasy, the embarrassing question arises insistently as to whose fantasy it will finally have been? The argument can indeed equally be made for the wife's having dreamed it as for the husband's having daydreamed it in passionate exhalations of revenge. (As we have seen, he is not a particularly passionate character, while the details of the White Chick's modus operandi cannot have been known to him either.) What this marks is the modernist interpretive temptation, the urge to tie up all the threads by integrating identifiable subjectivities and points of view. The "postmodern" alternative is then clearly what springs into view when subjects are abolished as meaningful categories (or if you prefer, when the hold of philosophies of the subject are significantly weakened), namely the aesthetic of textuality or of interminable segmentation, in which we are at equal distance from all successive sequences and the whole begins to offer itself as an immense set of variations or

recombinations, as in the *nouveau roman* or Robbe-Grillet's accompanying filmic production. But this temptation has been carefully conjured as well: if a certain period aestheticism clung to the modernist (and Gidean) theme of the *mise-en-abyme* of the story-within-a-story, a far more contemporary but still relatively archaic 1960s aestheticism surely informs this kind of permutational free play, and it is evidently not at all the note wished for in conclusion to this film.

What we must admire, therefore, is the way in which the filmmaker has arranged for these two powerful interpretive temptations - the modern and the postmodern, subjectivity and textuality - to neutralize each other, to hold each other in one long suspension in such a way that the film can exploit and draw on the benefits of both, without having to commit itself to either as some definitive reading or formal and stylistic category. Besides his personal mastery, the possibility of this mutually reinforcing suspension may owe something to the situation of Third World cinema itself, in traditions in which neither modernist nor postmodern impulses are internally generated and both arrive in the field of production with a certain chronological simultaneity in full postwar modernization. *Terrorizer* thereby enjoys the freedom of a certain distance from both, whose advantages this essay has explored.

But in conclusion, it is worth taking this alternation and coexistence of readings and competing interpretations even further and attempting to appreciate the way everything changes if for the masculine pathos of Li Li-chung's story we substitute the rather different drama of the women figures as the film's center of gravity. To see this as a film about women's destinies - whether it can be argued to be a properly feminist film I cannot judge - is to assert a certain postmodernity about it, to the degree that the women's situations here are grasped and articulated as fundamentally spatial. The male figures - doctor and photographer alike - are wrapped up in their temporal destinies: success or failure still hangs over them like the category of the future itself. Meanwhile, as males, they are spatially more mobile and can also console themselves with public areas, whether the police station, the hospital, or the streets themselves.

But the women's spaces are essentially those of confinement; the one form of public space open to the novelist is the television screen, scarcely a space to stretch or relax in. Archetypal here, of course, is the confinement of the Eurasian girl, locked up in her mother's apartment, as though it were not bad enough to be condemned to crutches. Even more intolerable for an adolescent is the way in which, in this particular apartment, she is imprisoned in the mother's own 1950s past, a past in which the mother is herself equally imprisoned, to the tune of "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes." In any case, our significant first view of the girl had been her desperate escape from the confinement of the murder apartment, while, equally significant, her time of greatest physical mobility is a frustrating nightlong bus ride back and forth across Taipei in a feverish state of exhaustion and collapse. Finally, her principal workplace, as it were, is not a public one, as with the men, but rather the quintessential anonymous hotel room, always the same, in which the selfsame drama of theft, violence, and blackmail is played out over and over again.

But this is not unique situation in the film: the photographer's girlfriend is equally imprisoned in a place that remains his, even after he removes his pictures, blowing curtains sealing off this now-abandoned space from the street and the out-of-doors in what is a virtual minor leitmotiv.

Nor is it clear that the writer's far more sumptuous apartment is any less constricting: "My world is shrinking," she literally tells her former lover. The semitrade-traditional rugs and furniture are wonderful occasions for catching the change of light, one of the fundamental concerns of this intensely visual and photographic film. Meanwhile, the bathroom, in which her doctor-husband washes his hands on his return from work, is suffused with a yellow glow virtually marked out as his symbolic color. We meet it again in a stunning sequence in the hospital as he mounts the stairs into a sea of yellow light; it may therefore be taken as essentially artificial, associated with modernization. But the far more open, and airtight space of the rest of the apartment, associated with Chou Yii-fen - a kind of yuppie or professional space, not unrelated to the even more expensive family villa of the young photographer (with pool and maid) - is not necessarily a great deal more positive. It is a kind of dead space, filled with elegant used furniture that is there primarily to be turned into images; and from it, just as clearly as the Eurasian girl from her locked apartment, Chou Y0-fen is driven to escape.

That modernism is temporal and postmodernism spatial has often been affirmed; the spatiality of *Terrorizer* and its images is inescapable. But I would like to insist on a unique feature of the spatiality of this film, which is the insistent relationship it establishes between the individual space and the city as a whole: the women's dramas are thus spatial not only because they are somehow postmodern (although the characterization of postmodernity in terms of the new social movements in general and of feminism in particular is a widespread one), but also because they are urban, and even more because they are articulated within this particular city.

Terrorizer is indeed very much a film about urban space in general, and offers something like an anthology of enclosed apartments or even individual rooms. It is these that predominate, and they are reconfirmed by the punctuation of an occasional street scene that always tends to return us to the aerial perspective, the view from above, the glance down from the balcony, and thus implicitly the confinement to the apartment on the upper story. The zero degree of this dwelling space would then be constituted by the murder room, as it is sealed off into darkness by the photographer. This act thereby betrays the essential characteristic of all these dwelling spaces, which are to serve as cubicles that open onto the city and the street in one way or another, and are somehow incomplete and spatially parasitic upon it. Only the Eurasian girl's hotel room is somehow buried in space, beyond the city somewhere, while the underworld, redolent of the *mysteres* of the classical nineteenth-century cities and melodramas, finds itself here reduced to a housing unit that gets repaired and repainted and only coincidentally rerented to someone who remembers what happened in it.

Taipei is here mapped and configured as a superimposed set of boxed dwelling spaces in which the characters are all in one way or another confined: the film thereby

acknowledges what seems to distinguish it from traditional and modern Chinese cities on the mainland, as well as from the cultural and historical styles of other cities in East Asia - a rapid construction of buildings along both sides of great linear arteries that are somehow its central formal category. The apartments do not imply the formal centrality of a single building to which they belong (as belatedly and extraordinarily as in Perec's novel *La Vie mode d'emploi*, about an apartment house). Nor do they offer the kind of panorama one experiences in Jesus Diaz's film, *Lejanía* - interiors into which Miami is projected by way of home movies and videotapes; a rooftop from which Havana as a whole is viewed spread out around us; and finally the real streets into which the protagonist, on the point of asphyxiation, manages to escape. But in this Second World film, the streets are still a genuinely public space of the collective social project.

The dominant First World experience of the postcontemporary city is surely that of gentrification, and of dead monuments that can no longer clearly be called public but that are no longer private either. What lies outside the gentrified zones is coming to be acknowledged as a new Third World space within the First World city. As for properly Third World urban representations, all that can be conjectured as a minimal generalization is perhaps the now-conventional form of the peasant as witness, the narrative point of view of the villager seeing the metropolis for the first time.

None of that seems to me comparable to this inscription of Taipei, which is also, as has already been observed, dialectically distinct from Hou Hsiao-hsien's images of the Taiwan countryside. A foreigner and an outsider may be permitted to conjecture that this way of looking at urban experience has something to do with the "representation of totality" of a small island that is also a non-national nation-state. The enclosed spaces in their range and variety thereby figure or embody the unevenness or inequality of the world system: from the most *traditional* kind of space, paradoxically or not, that is, the barracks apartment of the policeman (and it cannot be without significance that the protagonist, after washing his hands in so many modern and anonymous Western-style bathrooms and sinks, should kill himself in what is a very traditional-looking hot-tub-sauna type of area) all the way to the *national* space of the hospital, the *multinational* space of the publisher's office (the media, surely of a global range, now housed in a great glass high-rise), and what I am tempted to call the equally *transnational* anonymity of the hotel corridor with its identical bedrooms.

The allegorical comment being made here on Taipei itself is one that engages a kind of Third World situation we have rarely until now included in that (rather traditional) category, namely the developing Third World or the newly industrializing First World tier of the Third World or Pacific Rim (excluding Japan, to be sure). Taiwan is somehow within the world system as its citizens are in their city boxes: prosperity and constriction all at once, the loss of nature (which is observed only twice, in a park close-up and in the policeman's backyard, if one excludes the manicured pool and lawn of the student's villa), the failure of the urban to constitute itself by contrast with its counterpart. What is grand and exhilarating, light itself, the hours of

the day, is here embedded in the routine of the city and locked into the pores of its stone or smeared on its glass - light also being postmodern and a mere adjunct to the making of reproducible images.

I want to conclude by stressing that, in the postmodern, the relations between universal and particular, if they persist at all, must be conceived in an utterly different way from those that obtained in previous social formations and certainly from what characterized the modern. What I have found in this work from a "semiperipheral" country is not thereby "local" or provincial in any traditional sense, but is, rather, what makes this work universal in its aesthetic value (to use an old-fashioned language). It is because in late, capitalism and in its world system even the center is marginalized, and that powerful expression of the marginally uneven and the unevenly developed issuing from a recent experience of capitalism are often more intense and powerful, more expressive, and above all more deeply symptomatic and meaningful than anything the enfeebled center still finds itself able to say.

NOTES

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1. Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).
2. It is safe to say that Hou Hsiao-hsien (Hou Xiaoxian) is Taiwan's leading filmmaker today, and the first - after the liberalization of 1987, when for the first time the history of Taiwan since World War II could be discussed publicly - to launch into the construction of an ambitious historical epic, *City of Sadness* [*Beiqing chengshi*, 1989]. His social material, drawn from youth and the countryside, is quite distinct from that of Edward Yang, and the spirit of his fine works - a kind of populist pathos or sentimentalism - is also distinctive (as discussed later in this essay).
3. Renata Salecl has described such nationalisms (at work in Yugoslavian context) in terms of a most suggestive Lacanian analysis.
4. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 20-1.
5. I am indebted to Michael Denning for the observation that the Italian setting of *The Godfather, Part II* (1974) allows Coppola to avoid issues of race and drugs, which would have fatally reimposed themselves within the frame of the superstate itself.
6. Alessandro Manzoni *The Betrothed*, trans. Bruce Penman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 223-4.
7. I am grateful to Shu-chen Chiang for her commentary on an earlier version of this essay, as well as for the indispensable information about the Taiwan setting of the film and some of its local or vernacular connotations. I have also benefited greatly from Yingjin Zhang's "The Idyllic Country and the (Post) Modern City: Cinematic

Configurations of Family in *Osmanthus Alley* and *Terrorizer*," unpublished manuscript.

8. Clearly, this treatment demands comparison with the role and function of the deaf-and-dumb photographer in *City of Sadness*: he is the youngest son, something like the excluded witness, and, with his equally excluded Japanese wife, our most privileged "point of view." For that very reason, in Hou Hsiao-hsien's film, this character would seem to provide the technical means for estrangement in its classic, Russian-formalist sense (like, e.g., the child's point of view in Ambrose Bierce's *Chicamauga*).
9. Proust's pages on the telephone are to be found in *Le C6te de Guermantes*, Part 1 (Paris: Editions de la Pleiade, 1988), vol. 2, pp. 431-6; this technological mediation is immediately followed by an ocular inspection of Marcel's dying grandmother conveyed in terms of the technology of photography (pp. 438-9). In his "Modernism and Repetition: Kafka's Literary Technologies," *Journal of the Kafka Society of America* (1990), pp. 5963. James Rolleston draws our attention to Kafka's representation of the telephone.
10. In Walter Benjamin, "Berlin Childhood" (*Gesammelte Schriften, IV*, 284, in "Schranke"), translated as a separate unit in Shierry Webber Nicholson's English version of the Paris edition, "The Stocking": "The first cabinet that opened when I wanted it to was the bureau. I had only to pull on the knob and the door clicked open for me. Among the underclothing stored there was the thing that made the bureau an adventure. I had to make a path to the farthest corner; there I found my stockings piled, rolled up in the old-fashioned way. Each pair looked like a small pouch. Nothing gave me more pleasure than plunging my hand as deep as possible into the inside of that pouch. I did not do so for the sake of the warmth. It was 'The Dowry,' which I held in my hand in the rolled-up interior, that drew me into its depths. When I had got my hand around it and confirmed my possession of the soft woollen mass to the best of my ability, the second part of the game, which brought the revelation, began. For now I began working 'The Dowry' out of its woollen pouch. I drew it closer and closer to me until the amazing event occurred: I had extracted 'The Dowry,' but 'The Pouch' in which it had lain no longer existed. I could not test this process often enough. It taught me that form and content, the veil and what it hides, are one and the same. It led me to extricate the truth from literature as cautiously as the child's hand brought the stocking out of 'The Pouch.'"
11. Lacan uses the term "foreclusion" for the way in which, in psychosis - where language or the Symbolic Order is not available to organize such impulses - the sufferer's thoughts return as it were from the outside, in the form of disembodied voices, for example. See "On a Question Preliminary to Any Treatment of Psychosis," in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 179-225.
12. See my "Third-World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, no. 15 (Fall 1986), pp. 65-88.
13. See Jameson, *Postmodernism*, pp. 12ff.