GLOBAL MELODRAMA

NATION, BODY, AND HISTORY IN CONTEMPORARY FILM

CARLA MARCANTONIO

GLOBAL CINEMA

Edited by Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O'Healy

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Nation, Body, and History in Contemporary Film

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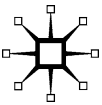

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Introduction: Global Melodrama

Melodrama elicits the participation of our senses. It causes us to buckle in tears, tugs at our heartstrings, harnesses our rage, swirls up our hope, requests our empathy, and prompts our sense of justice. For this reason, melodrama has been an enduring and crucial conduit for producing and mediating our understanding of the world around us. Our emotional contact with melodrama drives our complicity; it turns us into active participants of those very societies that it reflects back to us and which it helps construct. The melodramatic mode breathes dramatic life into those elements that ground our emotional experience of the world: our bodies, the family, the home, the nation, the community, the wish for romance, and the bonds that bind us. The stories melodrama helps tell remind us that we cannot move through the world intact—physically, psychically, or emotionally. We now live at a time when the transformations brought about by globalization, more and more, challenge how we perceive and make sense of the world around us, at times eliding the full reach of our comprehension. Film, predicated on the capture and projection of the world, and cinematic narratives, which participate in the process of both making sense of that world and creating sense for it, must view the world anew.

The ways in which globalization permeates our sociopolitical landscape has come to profoundly affect how we live, how we consume and experience culture, and how we connect to others. It is a world-spanning process that has, on the one hand, produced homogeneous spaces and cultures around the globe and yet, on the other, it thrives on mining local idiosyncrasies and established dynamics. It is a phenomenon that simultaneously connects and isolates us. In response to its border-crossing force field, the nation-states that "house" us have had to redistribute their powers and resources. The rapid rise of globalization in the twentieth century has increasingly interlinked economies and markets across the globe. Along with it, we have witnessed an unprecedented cross-border flow of capital, people, information, and mass cultures. As Marc Augé argues,

> [e]xperience of the remote has taught us to de-centre our way of looking, and we should make use of the lesson. The world of supermodernity does not exactly match the one in which we believe we live in, for we live in a world that we have not yet learned to look at.[1]

In other words, we may not yet recognize all of what globalization is, as it is yet in the process of its own realization.

Because melodrama is historically tied to the rise of the nation-state, I take it to be a useful lens through which to consider and visualize the "modernizing" effects that globalization has had vis-à-vis the nation, not least of which includes the claim that it inaugurates the nation-state's ultimate demise. At the turn of the nineteenth century, melodrama arose as a means to represent and help make sense of emerging democratic and industrial societies.[2] Ever since, melodrama has retained an elastic ability to adapt to varying incarnations of modernity, becoming a form that can engage with and process cultural, social, technological, and political change.[3] Throughout its history, it has remained invested in exploring scenarios that get to the root of how we live or that ask what about our lives matters most. In so doing, it incessantly seeks out the implementation of justice, and it investigates the bonds that yoke community together. These are issues that take on a particular charge during time periods of uncertain transition. Thus, if melodrama helped make sense of the birth of the modern nation, how, then, does it now represent the nation in view of the new threat that globalization poses to its sovereignty? My claim throughout this book is that melodrama allows us to make sense of the ways in which globalization has reorganized our affective and sociopolitical domains.

Melodramatic modes of representation have accompanied the historical development(s) of the nation by providing a shorthand form for national history to be represented in fiction narratives. In fact, it has been the preeminent vehicle through which the narration of the nation has incited the imagination and the emotion of its citizens.[4] Accordingly, studies on particular national cinemas will, more often than not, address melodrama and its shorthand gestures of historical allegory. In such allegorical representations of the nation, particular bodies and interpersonal conflicts stand in for larger social realities and historical processes. Melodrama's power and efficacy derive from the ways in which the body and ordinary experience—of those who would become the nation's citizens—come to bear the brunt of signification. The bounded character of the nation, the inviolability of its borders, has been figured through the body itself—sexed, gendered, marked by a particular ethnicity, race, and/or class. Such allegorical embodiments are part of the language of melodrama. The body's violability or inviolability, its status as proper or improper object,

plays into a film's drama; it is a way in which such narratives interpellate both subjectivity and subjecthood—forms of imagining citizenship. Put broadly, somewhere between the need to represent emerging sociopolitical concepts and the possibility that a national community can be imagined, melodrama is employed to do significant work.

Melodrama privileges the body because it is ultimately on the latter where the sociopolitical stakes its struggles. It both makes the body visible and exposes the conditions by which it is visualized. And because it has a stake in representing, melodrama has been a signpost for what is representable: it demarcates how, under what conditions, and for what purpose the paradigm of visibility and invisibility is deployed in the construction of knowledge, identity, and meaning. Yet, if the global era has brought parameters of visibility and representability into crisis, mostly through the sometimes real, sometimes imagined collapse of national boundaries, then how have cinematic narratives tied to national representation and the communal imagination shifted in the wake of globalization? Put another way, what are the new parameters for narration and representation when faced with the porous boundaries of the nation and the possibility that culture may be unbound from nationality?[5] When the body is made to bear the burden of representing the realities of our global environment, is it represented and representable in the same ways? For example, are the racially hybrid body and the ambivalently sexed body, so often cast as threats in melodramatic representations of the nation, likewise threatening to representations of globalization, or quite the contrary? How is the cosmopolitan body represented and showed to inhabit time and space differently, than, say, the immigrant body? Is there such a thing as an immigrant body that is represented one way in the context of national representation, but differently in the context of globalization? Or is the immigrant body always already a primitive body, a receptacle for the backward, even as it bears the brunt of signifying the geopolitical realities that fuel the global? And what does the cosmopolitan body, in this context, also erase?

Global Melodrama responds to the challenge of conceptualizing film study globally, beyond the demarcation of national cinema. Examining the kinds of transformations that melodrama has undergone in an era characterized by global capital expansion, I look at a diverse group of films: *Talk to Her* (2002), *The Skin I Live In* (2011), *In the Mood for Love* (2000), *2046* (2004), *Colossal Youth* (2006), *The Bubble* (2006), *Babel* (2006), and *The World* (2004). The focus on films produced in the twenty-first century is aimed at addressing late-stage globalization, one that also coincides with the increasing digitization of the film image, a technological transformation that bears important implications for how the body and reality—two central topics for melodrama—are represented on screen. My claim for the

films that comprise *Global Melodrama* is that they are tied to their local contexts and histories while they simultaneously address a larger, global reality. The analysis of the films negotiates a difficult balance between acknowledging their cultural, national, and historical specificity while also emphasizing the ways that the national can no longer be understood (if it ever really was) outside a transnational context. The films reveal the stakes of global melodrama, which, like globalization itself, does not have a single face, nor does it espouse a homogeneous ideological vantage point. In some cases, the films I address belong to and participate in a kind of global cosmopolitanism. In other cases, they perform a critique of the human devastation brought about by globalization. At the same time, the distinction is not always so clear-cut. In this sense, I am not interested in reproducing a dichotomy that has often beset melodramatic criticism, whereby texts are demarcated as either reactionary or subversive vis-à-vis dominant ideology. In fact, what makes melodrama such a productive object of study is that by and large it dialogues with elements of both. For this reason, the purpose underlying the disparity of the texts assembled here is about investigating the reordering of generic convention that global melodrama performs around film style, tropes of national and gendered embodiment, temporality, and the affective territories of home and family.

The films I have selected might not all strike one as melodramas. These are, after all, art house films, a distinction that may seem contradictory given that melodrama is most commonly regarded as a cornerstone of mainstream modes of production. Independent and art cinema are assumed to work against the grain of more commercial modes of cinematic representation, including genre. However, as the films included here demonstrate, this does not mean that such texts unanimously break normative cinematic codes. Rather, what makes these films of interest is how they negotiate the in-between of belonging, not just in narrative terms but also in stylistic terms. In some cases, this is also a question of aesthetics, as the example of a rising tide of global, counter-ideological films that ascribe to something akin to a neorealist aesthetic.[6] Yet, I would also caution that the ideologies fueling the disparate narratives can actually run counterintuitively to the stylistic paradigms employed. As I will argue in Chapter 4, in the case of neorealism, it is also true that rather than depart from melodrama, its films update the form for counter-ideological purposes. In *The World* and *Colossal Youth*, for example, their neorealist aesthetic documents a different phase of cinema's relationship to the city and to economic reality than its Italian predecessors, one that focuses on the displacement and alienation produced not by the ravages of World War II but by a different kind of devastation: global capital expansion.

This book does not claim to track melodrama as a genre that is produced globally; rather, as I note above, it concerns itself with a subset of art house films, which I term "global melodrama." Global melodrama refers to films that map new arrangements of space, embodiment, and temporal configurations by directly engaging the conventions and paradigms of melodramatic expression, even when employed against the grain. In choosing "global" as an adjective to demarcate this specific incarnation of melodrama, I do not so much propose an entirely novel style of melodrama as I aim to signal a new stage in melodrama's historical transformation. Yet, to speak of global melodrama is a way to indicate that melodrama is somehow now different than it has been in the past: that it does something new. First and foremost, global melodrama is and is not in the service of narrating the nation. I thus contend that it is in this slippage, or slippery relationship to the national, where global melodrama resides.

Consequently, I take melodrama to be neither a historically stable genre nor one that remains fixed in its definition. The way in which the films that comprise this study problematize the status of the nation as bounded territory matches the way in which they do not employ melodrama as a self-contained genre, but rather they tap into its built-in capacity to traverse and thus hybridize genres. I consider melodrama to be both a genre and a mode, though I primarily address it as the latter. Melodrama's ties to film are almost as long as the medium's history and varied. Though melodrama has been present from almost the beginning of the film business, especially in Hollywood, academically, attention to melodrama in film is tied to the rise of the field of film studies in the 1970s, particularly in the case of feminist film criticism and psychoanalytic film theory, two interrelated endeavors that were profoundly influential in the years when film became established as a legitimate academic field of study.[7] In no small part, the reevaluation of melodrama was responsible for upturning the divisions between "high" and "low culture" that allowed film—as popular culture—to be taken seriously. Nonetheless, melodrama has never completely shed its disrepute. The study of the so-called women's film, or family melodrama, was one of the first areas where the question of filmic representation and its ideological implications came to bear, particularly in Marxist- and psychoanalytically-inspired analyses and critiques of the dominant ideology reproduced by classical narrative forms; yet, in some cases, the analysis has centered on films that themselves critiqued bourgeois capitalism from within the Hollywood studio system.[8] In fact, a critique of classical Hollywood and its patriarchal ideology was in many ways inextricably linked to denouncing classical film narrative, beginning with the work of D. W. Griffith. The genealogy from Griffith's Victorian novel-inspired innovations in cinematic form to the Freudian-inflected

"women's films" of the 1940s and 1950s is undeniable.[9] Yet, as work like Ben Singer's on melodrama and modernity has demonstrated, the term "melodrama" has been used to describe, throughout the history of the medium, very different kinds of films.[10] Broadly speaking, the rubric has shifted from grouping films predicated on external action at the turn of the twentieth century (what Singer calls "sensational" melodrama), to a genre associated with structures of interiority, be it the psyche or the home, as feature-length films turned away from these sensational narratives.

Linda Williams has proposed that melodrama be understood as the fundamental element through which American popular cinema has functioned, neither as genre nor a deviation from classical narrative, but, rather, as a mode that underpins both.[11] In this respect, I concur with the view that melodrama is a mode that allows us to apprehend and rethink film history, not just within the bounds of American cinema but in the context of global cinema as well. Art cinema, for as much as it is an ideological alternative to Hollywood cinema, in both narrative and stylistic terms, also shares a symbiotic relationship to Hollywood. Art cinema reworks Hollywood melodramatic convention in a way that still retains the former's claim for universal legibility. As Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt have argued, "[if] art films are to travel to international audiences, they must make the claim that their forms and stories are comprehendible across languages and cultures."[12] Yet, the authors note that a distinguishing feature of art cinema is the way in which the geopolitical realm becomes central to its discursive field. I would argue that one consequence of this insistence on the geopolitical is that art cinema pushes melodramatic convention to address post-World War II geopolitical realities. Films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959), to name some examples, point to the way in which melodrama was reconfigured by both Italian neorealism and the French New Wave as a response to the new geopolitical climate. Moreover, the directors at the helm of the films that make up this study not only circulate as global auteurs—staple presences on the international film circuit—but they have also made their stylistic marks by engaging, and reworking melodrama directly: Pedro Almodóvar, Wong Kar-wai, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Eytan Fox. The case of the melodramatic allegiance of Jia Zhangke's and Pedro Costa's films is not as clear, but as I argue in Chapter 4, this is only due to how under-theorized the role of melodrama has been in the appraisal of Italian neorealism, which I claim first transforms melodrama in order to address the geopolitical realities of the postwar moment.

Through the images and narratives deployed by these filmmakers, this book aims to investigate how the concept of the national, along with the

identity constructions that inhabit and uphold it, is redeployed and transfigured in order to address the new historical threshold that globalization represents. *Global Melodrama* thus argues that the way in which globalization confounds the boundaries of the nation challenges the paradigms upon which melodramatic representation has depended: modes of embodiment, structures of temporality, the figure of "home," the linear organization of history, and the tropes of coincidence upon which its imagining an interconnected social landscape depends. The global era engenders dramas that speak to our being both bound and unbound by the elements that demarcate our mode of inhabiting and imagining community. Whatever else it is, it is clear that film melodrama is still concerned with the private sphere (home, family, gendered identity, sexuality, etc.) and with dramas dealing with the collision between public and private spheres. But, as I will show, these demarcations are insufficient for categorizing the various kinds of work that melodrama does for narrative and representation in the context of late-stage globalization. I propose that, rather than having become obsolete, melodrama continues to do significant work toward helping us make affective sense of a global environment that exceeds the legally demarcated contours of the state.

Melodrama: From the Nation to Globalization

Melodrama's ties to globalization come first by way of the mode's relationship to nationalism. It is no coincidence that the birth of the modern nation and the birth of melodrama, which first emerged as a theatrical genre, date roughly to the time period that brackets the French Revolution. Following the end of the dynastic period, a new configuration of sovereignty emerged, as the body of the king came to be replaced by an abstraction: the state. Sovereignty, no longer embodied in the figure of the monarch, becomes the all-pervasive domain of the nation and its legally demarcated territory.[13] In this new imagining of territory, authority is no longer codified in divinely ordained terms, but in legal ones. Peter Brooks, in his influential treatise on melodrama, argues that it arises in response to the spiritual void left by the end of the dynastic era: "[melodrama] comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern."[14] For Brooks, melodrama becomes the principal mode for revealing a "moral universe" in the post-sacred era, a reason that it embodies a "democratization of morality and its signs."[15] In fact, also addressing the rise of the modern nation, the critics Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri unwittingly uncover the latent melodramatic potential

of the concept of nation when they argue that the nation arises as the symptom of a repressed trauma:

> [b]etween the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the concept of national sovereignty finally emerged in European thought in its completed form. At the base of this definitive figure of the concept were a trauma, the French Revolution, and the resolution of that trauma, the reactionary appropriation and celebration of the concept of nation.[16]

For Hardt and Negri, this "reactionary appropriation" refers to the rise of the bourgeoisie and of a capitalist economy. Thus, both Peter Brooks and Thomas Elsaesser propose that melodramatic representation arose as a response to this new ideological and political configuration, one that, in looking to articulate democratic ideals, demanded new avenues for the pursuit of justice and the grounding of meaning. Because of this, melodrama is the cultural form that is called upon to dramatize and represent these changes.[17]

Globalization's biggest threat to the nation form, its challenge to national sovereignty, comes from the ways in which it transcends national borders and dissects territories in a manner that has also resulted in structures of power becoming decentered and deterritorialized.[18] Yet, it is notable that melodrama did not disappear as either the nation form matured or as multiple avenues for imagining community have arisen—a development that takes us from print capitalism, as noted by Benedict Anderson, to the rise of the multiplicity of *-scapes* that Arjun Appadurai proposes as an update to Anderson's paradigm, one where migration and a mass media imaginary transcend national space (he terms these mediascapes, financescapes, ethnoscapes, idioscapes, and technoscapes).[19] In fact, as many critics of melodrama have suggested, it has become a fascinating, mutable entity.[20] Williams, for example, calls it a "wonderful 'leaping' fish" and a "perpetually modernizing form."[21] Thus, though integrally useful for representing and perpetuating the myths of the nation, melodrama is more intimately bound to the contradictions of modernity, lodged in its very ambivalences—the nation only one incarnation.

The body and questions of embodiment are key to how melodrama operates. Melodrama originally emerged in theater, where, because it derived from the tradition of *pantomime dialoguée*, the actor's body was called upon to dramatize inexpressible emotions and states of being. As Peter Brooks has argued, "[t]he gestures of life call forth a series of interrogations aimed at discovering the meanings implicit in them."[22] And for this reason, he notes, pressure is applied to gesture in order to make it yield

meaning. Embodiment in melodrama is thus a concept that refers to how bodies are represented, both in what they do represent as well as what they fail to represent. And, given the demand placed on the body to signify, theatricality and melodrama have been intimately intertwined; they collude to create what Brooks calls an "aesthetics of embodiment."[23] Hence, it should hardly seem surprising that gender and sexuality become central nodes of concern as well as contested categories for the melodramatic national imagination. This representational shift toward the body coincides with the move away from the body as an explicit site of the monarch's control and power and toward an internalized mode of social control. Foucault traces this transition in the opening pages of *Discipline and Punish*, as he notes the change that takes place during this time period between torture as public spectacle, the pain of the body its central subject, and the introduction of the guillotine, which punishes a juridical subject from his right to exist, an abstract concept levelled on the body.[24] Hardt and Negri identify this evolution that Foucault traces as one that marks the separation between a disciplinary society and the society of control: the latter defines modern society. The difference between one and the other hinges on the role that spectacle plays in the theater of punishment: from a purely visible mode to an increasingly atomized and internalized one. For Foucault, the modern body is "directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs."[25] In like manner, Brooks states of the body in melodrama that it behaves hysterically, as he explains, "if by hysteria we understand a condition of bodily writing, a condition in which the repressed affect is represented on the body . . . hysteria gives us the maximal conversion of psychic affect into somatic meaning—meaning enacted on the body itself."[26] One thus finds echoes of Foucault's description of the emerging body politic in Brooks' account of the rise of the melodramatic mode.[27] It takes about another century before said theater is fully internalized and integrated into the "discovery" of the psyche and its unconscious. Central to this process of the internalization of power, again, is Foucault's sense that "[t]he control of society over individuals is not conducted only through consciousness or ideology, but also in the body and with the body. For capitalist society biopolitics is what is most important, the biological, the somatic, the corporeal."[28] For Hardt and Negri, furthermore, globalization heralds an era where biopolitics becomes the dominant political and social vehicle: as power becomes further dispersed, the role of the body in sustaining it becomes ever more crucial.

Bodies as displayed on screen demarcate visibility from invisibility, the knowable from the unknown, and, therefore, they signal modes of proper belonging in contrast to those forms of being that are marked as

non-desirable, if not altogether disposable. In other words, it is impossible to unbind questions of visibility, and how intricately entwined with identity these are, from issues of nationality. This is one of the central reasons that melodramatic narrative is so often employed in figurations of the national imaginary: it helps map, in ways that ultimately remain etched on the body, the inside and outside of belonging. The ways in which the body is marked by race, class, and gender reflect the valence with which these characteristics are charged to signify within a particular cultural and political imaginary. And thus, melodramatic embodiment reveals how the representation of the body is an ideological tool employed in the service of imagining community, with and through the body.

Yet, as I have argued, melodramatic modes of representation necessarily shift when forced to contend with the reality of the increased porousness of borders that globalization has heralded, complicating the structures that organize the imaginary of the nation: sanctioned modes of embodiment and kinship, as well as specific arrangements of spatial and temporal continuity (bounded space, chronological time). In fact, when speaking of a reorganized temporal imagination, one could say that global melodrama calls out the nation's bluff—insofar as how it constructs its national narratives. As Homi Bhabha has reminded us, the nation is an invention that in turn invented itself an origin. This conjured origin predates the historical moment in which nations came into being. Therefore, because the nation posits itself to have existed from time immemorial, it thereby produces "a continuous narrative of national progress."[29] This temporal trick, so to speak, allows the nation to take up the mantle of modernity. Narratives of the nation, moreover, aim to subsume the fundamental indeterminacy and ambivalence of the nation into an imaginary that fabricates ideas of progress, homogeneity, the deep nation, the long past.[30] I would argue that the kinds of narratives that speak to the global imaginary instead hold onto a sense of indeterminacy and ambivalence around nationality and belonging in favor of producing a transnational rather than a national imaginary—such narratives retain the presence of the borders between (and within) nations rather than imagining the border as the nation's horizon. The weakening of the nation's hold on temporal organization, bounded territory, and modernity, which has been the result of the transformations that we subsume under the rubric of globalization, is part of what allows Appadurai to claim that modernity is now "at large." But modern nation-building projects were also imperial projects, which have since seen their demise in the postcolonial era. The already global nature of colonialism, as many have noted, lies at the base of our current global landscape. Globalization, therefore, represses some of its own origins and histories. Hence, what ultimately emerges in narratives about globalization

is the convergence and overlaying of many histories across time and territory, creating a trans-territorial and trans-temporal mode of imagination, which this book explores.

Accordingly, the new articulations of the melodramatic mode call for the temporal reconfiguration of notions of origin, the past, and history. I further propose that we understand the rise in what has been termed atemporal cinema through this lens. Atemporal cinema refers to films that splinter linear narrative. In so doing, their spectator is left to assemble the temporal puzzles they create. Films such as *The Skin I Live In*, *In the Mood for Love*, *2046*, *Babel*, and *Colossal Youth*, all respond to this new temporal aesthetic. Not surprisingly, atemporal cinema is a narrative style that has also come hand in hand with the late stage of globalization, and especially alongside the turn to digital cinema in the decades that have straddled the turn to the twenty-first century. Todd McGowan, for example, has argued that contemporary films rearrange temporality in order to approximate the experience of the digital world.[31] But, such an argument, though certainly in line with the experience of our current moment, also remains problematically ahistorical. As an alternative, I maintain that the films that I call global melodramas build their atemporality on the frame of overlapping histories, representing complex global-local articulations.

Global Melodrama revisits tropes that have helped sustain melodrama's inquiry into our social structures and explores how they are revised in the service of both narrating and visualizing this new threshold. Such melodramatic conventions include the trope of recognition (tied to the Manichaean juxtaposition between virtue and villainy), the last-minute rescue, expressions of muteness and excess, the signifying presence of the body (often marked as imperiled in some way), the home and the nation as places of belonging, and how these themes, in turn, help organize the imagining of community. These melodramatic tropes, I argue, continue to inform melodramatic representation, though they are also employed in novel ways.

The Tropes of Melodrama

I will first turn to the issue of melodramatic recognition. The drama of recognition lies at the heart of the perception that melodrama presents us with a Manichaean universe—a flattening of nuance and complexity in favor of producing a simplistically rendered moral landscape. In this incarnation, melodrama stages a conflict between good and evil, whereby, as readers and spectators, we are cued to identify with virtue and made to abhor the ways in which villainy lays siege to it. But, though the distinction between the virtuous and the villainous may be made clear to the spectator,

it is not always self-evident within the world a given text depicts; this explains why certain dominant scenarios of melodrama play out situations around veiling and unveiling: "masked relationships and disguised identities, abductions, slow-acting poisons, secret societies, [and] mysterious parentage."[32] Melodrama, then, takes as its subject the process of revealing what may be right before our eyes but unrecognized, unacknowledged. Virtue represents a desired characteristic within a community (as large or small as it may be) while villainy delimits the traits that must be othered, rendered abject. The two oppositions work together to cohere the ideal "moral" composition of a given community. For this reason, the drama of recognition (along with its companion, misrecognition) is one of melodrama's central tropes. The process of recognition that is played out at the interpersonal level is one that also interpellates us, the audience, as individuals, and it provides us with the momentarily soothing fantasy that the world and the mysterious forces that propel it can be rendered perfectly legible and visible. If, as Williams notes, melodrama is the dominant mode through which society seeks "moral legibility under new conditions of moral ambiguity," then what melodrama aims to resolve, and in doing so highlights, is precisely a condition of ambiguity rather than the certainty for which a Manichaean universe is present (or presented) as wish fulfillment.[33] Yet, all too often, melodrama is simply conflated with Manichaeism.

Melodramatic narratives play out the drama of recognition to the very end; it is essential to a given film's narrative resolution (the happy or unhappy ending), and thus to the moral judgment delivered. Through its recourse to the happy or unhappy ending, melodrama reveals its bent either for denouncing an unjust world or, alternately, for imagining a just one. And, in so doing, its stories labor to make sense of senseless suffering. As Williams has argued, "unlike tragedy, melodrama does not reconcile its audience to an inevitable suffering."[34] For this reason, the demand for recognition drives melodrama's ethical, political, and existential imperatives; it implicates the foundations upon which the social fabric is built and places the assumptions that underpin how we understand interactions among people and their environment on display. In a global context, the trope of recognition expands to include concerns for how one can comprehend and access the world, be it in terms of community, nation, or a transnational environment. Furthermore, the films that I discuss reveal another notable trend in global-era melodramas: we see a predominance of suffering males, whereas, more commonly, we tend to associate melodrama with female protagonists and their suffering. At times, the emphasis on male suffering points to the imagined loss of potency of the nation-state in the context of globalization. This non-gendered specificity (insofar as

who "suffers") also speaks, then, to a collapse between the public and private sphere (so often understood in gendered terms). Yet, one should also be careful not to make too much of this gender distinction for, as Gledhill has argued, melodrama is a category that has been deeply caught up in the process of gendering Western popular culture, but this does not mean that melodrama is itself a gender-specific form: "there is no simple identification to be made between gender, whether male or female, and melodrama at any point in its history."[35]

This book argues that global melodrama updates the mode's tendency for manufacturing dichotomies for a world in which dichotomies fail, or fail to be fully descriptive of our social relations. I propose that this is one explanation for why certain contemporary melodramas no longer produce clearly coded good guys and bad guys. In fact, this is a distinction that collapses, becomes confused, or disappears altogether. Throughout the chapters, I will argue that the trope of recognition has become an essential narrative and moral measure, yet one that by necessity operates beyond the Manichaean demarcation of virtue and villainy.

The transnational visual field now creates ample avenues and traps for recognition: it both enables it and hinders it, a quality that makes film a vehicle through which to explore the overlapping and contradictory experiences of the current stage of global modernity. At a time when visibility is reorganized—when social, cultural, and national markers have become unmoored from their "native" contexts—melodramatic representation must answer to new parameters for expressing sentiments of belonging and/or alienation. For example, the drama of recognition can serve to punctuate concerns around the kind of homogeneity that globalization has spawned. At the same time, it can also speak to the ways in which the foreign has become familiar, or it can address those moments when the familiar suddenly turns foreign. The visual character of film, and the ways it travels around the globe, both complicates and reflects these paradoxes of estrangement and recognition, of being proximate and yet distant. In such a context, both recognition and misrecognition are at play while the individual negotiates the mutability of her immediate surroundings. Therefore, I contend that aside from animating issues of morality, the problem of recognition, especially in the context of global melodrama, can instead serve to stage crises around visuality, identity, and translation. Or, put otherwise, issues around visuality, identity, and translation negotiate tensions around what might count as moral and just in a global context (as social relationships are also increasingly mediated by images and visual modes of representation).

Accordingly, rather than to focus on melodrama's Manichaeism, I am more interested in how the notion of recognition becomes tied to issues of

identity and cultural translation—topics that are more apropos to a global landscape that cannot depend on the clear demarcations of inside and outside, of belonging and not belonging, whereby the villain, in most cases, is a figure that embodies those traits that the national imaginary would "other." But, as long as justice and equality remain ideals not yet arrived at, regardless of the status of the nation-state, melodrama will continue to be a socially relevant mode.

Second, such recognitions are ensconced in the contingencies of linear time. In Linda Williams' useful terms, melodramatic resolutions often depend on those belated, or prompt, arrivals that happen either "too late" or "in the nick of time." As Williams notes, "time and timing become all important" in melodrama.[36] The last-minute rescue, the latent recognition, the revelation of truth, the reversal of fortune, the wished-for cure, or the enactment of justice hinge upon the creation of this narrative suspense. And thus the drama of recognition is also being played out against the clock. Consequently, a crucial aspect of melodramatic temporality revolves around the timeliness or belatedness of its dramatic action, part of what ultimately endows virtue and villainy with legibility (by the end, the villain is revealed, while virtue is heroically rescued). And, though global melodrama does not appear to emphasize a distinction between virtue/villainy, it does retain its concern around temporality. Ensuring the legibility of the victim/villain dichotomy proves to be secondary to the mode's deployment of chance as a way to inscribe temporality—something that further questions the notion that Manichaeism is one of melodrama's defining elements. As we will see, once I turn to the analysis of the specific case studies, the paradigm of "too late/in the nick of time" is employed in ways that open new avenues for melodramatic signification.

Melodrama has also extracted dramatic power from deploying the opposing forces of action and stasis, or pathos and action. Another way that I like to restate this paradigm of pathos and action is to refer to it as the psychic and kinetic temporalities of melodrama. One connotes a movement forward in time: the cause-effect nature of action (the rescue, the chase, and so forth) and of narrative itself. The other refers to less mobile and perhaps sometimes stagnant temporalities: that of waiting, repetition, and a multiplicity of states of being and feeling that do not necessarily contribute toward moving the narrative forward. This general characteristic of melodrama takes on a particular role in some of the global melodramas that I will discuss, as it not only serves to underscore the multiplicity of temporalities that uphold and drive global interconnectivity, but it also lends form to the felt alienation of the "global" subject. If shock and distraction were part of the experience undergone by those roaming the industrialized landscape that characterized modernity's urban centers,

then disorientation, dislocation, and delay seem to be more pertinent states and conditions for describing the experience of those living in a highly mediated and "speeded"-up environment—one that no longer necessarily takes place in urban locales, nor that necessitates traversing actual space (given that spaces and the experience of them can also be accessed virtually). Considering this paradigm alongside that of the last-minute rescue, I contend that melodrama, through its temporal structure, is internally equipped with the capability of subsuming into its narrative framework the reality of the acceleration of time and constriction of space that characterize the post-Fordist environment in which globalization thrives. Or, as Bhaskar Sarkar has remarked, globalization, experienced as delays, deferrals, or even failures, is already experienced melodramatically in the postcolonial world. This is at least one reason for the enduring persistence of the mode in those "societies that find themselves forever in the waiting room of history," negotiating the contradictions and anxieties around modernity and modernizing processes.[37]

For example, this paradigm of movement and stasis plays a central role in Almodóvar's *Talk to Her*, where the women lie immobile, in comas at a hospital, and the two men in the film are differentiated by stasis (Benigno, a nurse) and movement (Marco, a travel guide writer); or, in *Babel*, where certain characters bear the brunt of pushing the narrative action forward (a border-crossing Mexican nanny, or the presumptive child terrorists in Morocco) while others are beset with the role of waiting (an American man and his wounded wife) or mourning (the Japanese father and daughter). At the farthest extreme, in a film like *Colossal Youth*, all the characters seem to do is wait, suspended beyond time, neither last-minute rescue nor moment of redemption in sight. Ventura, its protagonist, moves around in space but with no sense of direction. Cases like these underline how the dialectic of pathos and action that informs melodrama is employed in novel ways. If, as Augé and other critics of globalization suggest, temporality and space have been unbound from their geometric and mass-based parameters, it is also both true and false about the individual subject who inhabits these spaces; her psyche might at times keep up with the rapidly changing, virtual landscape but her bodily existence physiologically limits the speed and fragmenting she can experience. The time lag of recognition holds open a space of potentiality: a recognition yet to come may signal the potential for the arrival of a new world, a new possibility yet to materialize.

Third, melodrama has also derived affective power from its ability to negotiate the two extremes represented by the excess of expression, on the one hand, and muteness, on the other. Peter Brooks argues that melodrama ultimately represents the struggle to articulate the inarticulable; it probes the surface of social reality for moral legibility: "the gestures of life call forth

a series of interrogations aimed at discovering the meanings implicit in them."[38] Reality in melodrama is both the scene for drama and "a mask for the true drama that lies behind."[39] Its penchant for tracking the extremes of expression, or the lack thereof, derives from this sense of the need to probe for meaning. Excess and muteness thus represent the polar ends of the same expressionistic spectrum. It has often been noted that melodramatic style is predicated on a certain excess of display whereby all that is inexpressible is displaced onto the mise-en-scène. But, if one thinks of the expressionistic excesses of melodrama as a way that the visual field registers that there is always something that exceeds us, of which we are yet part of, then we might arrive at another ethical imperative of melodrama. And, as my analysis of the films will illustrate, the historical past will appear as one of these marks of excess. The paradigms of muteness and excess can thus come to describe, symbolize, and dramatize an entirely new order of experience where cultural translatability or untranslatability are increasingly put in play. Hence, I argue that the polarity of excess and muteness that is ingrained in the form helps articulate the realities of a global environment in which the need for the translatability of culture becomes increasingly necessary.

Fourth, melodrama and melodramatic representations are most often associated with images of home—the family and the domestic sphere—one reason for which melodrama is still too often conflated with "the woman's film." The dramas of home and family have always provided a mirror through which to understand the ideological underpinnings of particular national narratives. Yet, in the globally minded melodramas that this book discusses, the figure of the home either becomes a hybrid concept, or is vacated altogether—a gesture that produces an abundance of "homeless" characters (whether real or existential). The "traditional" home becomes either a hospital room (*Talk to Her*) or a luxurious villa qua dungeon (*The Skin I Live In*); rented quarters in others' homes (*In the Mood for Love*) or rooms in a cheap hotel (*2046*); a queer family of unmarried roommates (*The Bubble*); a stranger's hut and a hardly-lived-in high-rise apartment *(Babel*); crowded dorms for underpaid migrant workers (*The World*); and either the slum dwellings threatened with destruction, or the hollow spaces of government-subsidized housing (*Colossal Youth*). In 1987, the title of Christine Gledhill's influential edited collection on melodrama proclaimed that *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. Where, then, does the emotive center of global melodrama reside? If melodrama continues to find relevance and appeal in today's global-local landscape, it is because the need to make sense of contradicting, overlapping, embedded, and disaggregated modes of belonging and experience has only become more, not less, urgent.

Finally, given that melodrama is grounded in representations of both embodiment and realism, new technologies, like non-indexical digital capture and manipulation, necessarily change how we conceive of bodies and reality. Film melodrama's relationship to technology dates back to the beginning of cinema and to cinema's intimate relationship to the developments of the industrial revolution (itself one of its progeny). Ben Singer's work on melodrama and modernity has been important for dislodging our sense that melodrama is only about the home and domesticity, which was, historically, only a later incarnation of the mode. Singer's work charts the moment (1885–1920) when films adopted sensational melodrama from the stage to the screen; cinema then rapidly displaced theater as the predominant conduit for melodrama. In *Melodrama and Modernity*, Singer expands upon the dominant notion of urban modernity—that the experience of it is characterized by distraction, hyper-stimulus, and sensory "shocks"—by also noting how much the body itself, in turn-of-the-century melodramas, was presented as physically imperiled. In these early melodramas, the body appears dangerously prone to maiming by the transport mechanisms that moved this era forward: locomotives, steamships, fire engines, automobiles, hot-air balloons, suspension bridges, etc. These developments made the body susceptible to tragic accidents. The imminent threat of death, being maimed, and falling from tall buildings (because this time period also saw the rise of skyscrapers) were recurring motifs that animated the dramatic complications enacted in both stage and film melodrama.[40] How quickly stage melodrama was replaced by its filmic counterpart demonstrates that, ultimately, film was the medium that would most convincingly represent the peril that beset the body in the face of such modern conveyances.

Global-era melodrama continues to contend with technology. Yet, as far as global modernity is concerned, there are radically different dangers experienced by a body in the context of an increasingly digitized environment, for example. The threat is derived more from the alienation occasioned by virtual experience and the ways in which it abstracts the body from its mere flesh-and-blood existence. Bodies that fly and glide through space—popularized internationally by the success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon/Wu hu cang long* (2000)—went hand in hand with the encroachment of digital media in cinema and upon our everyday lives.[41] In these cases, the body is no longer embedded within the matrix of gravity (falling from tall buildings, for example) but, rather, freed into complete weightlessness. The danger (and freedom, depending on the vantage point) posed has to do with the body's capacity to be abstracted from organic experience—ours is the era of prosthetically lived lives.[42] Therefore, the link that Singer draws between melodrama and technology is

important for also thinking through the history of film melodrama from the vantage point of the global. The body, in a global context, is irrevocably tied to a locality, while at the same time it is virtually transported by the innumerable opportunities for prosthetic experience that the increasingly technologically driven environment gives rise to. There is a certain cinematic "loss" of the world's physical reality, which is now, in the digital era, one that can be conjured and manipulated at will. This is something that has profound implications for how we think of bodies projected on screen.

Moreover, as far as the human body is concerned, the digitization of information (visual and otherwise) has an analogous counterpart in the biotechnology revolution, which has created a new frontier, one that charts inroads into molecular territory—the biopolitical and technological machinery that drives these processes is redefining the limits of life and the human. And, though the foray into molecular territory might seem a topic more appropriately probed by science fiction, melodrama's sustained concern around sovereignty—predicated on the power exercised over bodies—proves relevant to charting the consequences of the biocybernetic reorganization of power as well. My first chapter deals directly with this transformation.

Chapter Breakdown

The melodramatic tropes that I have outlined—recognition, the last-minute rescue (temporality), excess and muteness, home/homelessness, and embodiment—are explored in each of the chapters of the book, yet each chapter is organized to respond to a larger theme: Chapter 1 deals with the representation of the body, Chapter 2 probes the role of memory, Chapter 3 investigates the issue of borders, and Chapter 4 considers the relationship between neorealism and melodrama. The first chapter analyzes Pedro Almodóvar's *Talk to Her* (2002) and *The Skin I Live In* (2011), while the second chapter focuses on Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2001) and *2046* (2004). I devote a chapter to each director because they are two of the first auteurs to push melodrama to express the realities of a globally interconnected environment, partly due to the fact that their body of work addresses transitional historical moments (Spain's embrace of democracy, Hong Kong's handover to China) that presage the global-local tensions that would surface between globalization and the nation-state. Almodóvar and Wong began their careers much earlier than the directors considered in the second half of the book (Almodóvar's first film is in 1980, Wong's in 1988). The second section of the book looks at a new generation of filmmakers who have engaged with the melodramatic mode as a means to represent our global environment and give form to our experience of

it. These remaining chapters, rather than focus on a single director, pair films that illustrate a particular facet of global melodrama, sometimes from divergent vantage points.

Chapter 1, "Biopolitical Embodiments: *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In*," investigates the "politics of bodiliness" in melodrama; it looks at how bodies are traversed by historically repressed traumas and biopolitical modes of control. Almodóvar's work develops over the span of 30 years that witness the kinds of transitions that took longer to take shape in other Western countries. In the 1980s, Spain emerged from the grip of a long-standing totalitarian regime in order to embrace a democracy that would soon thereafter find itself in the midst of an unprecedented economic boom, driven by the same neoliberal policies that propel economic globalization. Perhaps for this reason, it too would be one of the first economies to suffer the disastrous social and political consequences of the recklessly pursued boom. My analysis of the films in this chapter contributes to the large body of work on Almodóvar by shifting attention away from how gender and sexuality signify in his films (a predominant lens through which his films have been studied) and, instead, looks toward how the films address the biopolitical foundations of modern embodiment. In other words, my first chapter revisits melodrama's roots in the advent of modern sovereignty, in order to consider how biopolitical concerns were, from the onset, ingrained in it.

The reason my first chapter focuses on *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* is that the films employ medical settings for their melodramatic elaborations, pushing the boundary further around the notion that the theater invokes life, and that life is itself theater. They thus provide a fertile ground from which to probe the connection between modern sovereignty and biopolitics. In other words, if melodrama once turned to the stage as a means to represent social reality, in these films the body itself is revealed as a stage where identity and politics fuse together into one and the same. At the same time, the medical tropes of these films address the organic interdependence of bodies in an increasingly interconnected global environment. This trend toward revealing the biological base of a political identity is also evinced in films such as *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, 2002), *The Island* (Michael Bay, 2005), *Time* (Kim Ki-duk, 2006), *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009), and *Never Let Me Go* (Mark Romanek, 2010)—to name only a few examples. These films, along with *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In*, unveil the biopolitical roots of modern, human embodiment.

Bodies such as those of Vera *(The Skin I Live In)* and Alicia (*Talk to Her*) straddle the boundary of what is wholly intelligible and, therefore, representable. These characters also demonstrate how one's identity is predicated on shared histories—those very elements that cohere community.

The films' ultimate ethical imperative revolves around the recognition of Otherness and the need to remember, even if prosthetically, the erasures and violences upon which our present historical moment is grounded. This chapter proposes that we return to an observation of Brooks' regarding the foundations of melodrama that has not been explored. Brooks argues that a politics of bodiliness was founded on the disinterment and complete effacement of the bodies of the kings of France in the wake of the French Revolution. As he notes, the new ideological order required that even the remnants of those bodies had to be completely disposable.[43] Both *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* are predicated on understanding the presence of absent bodies in the sociopolitical and historical reality of post-Franco Spain, a kind of haunting presence that also allows for the imagining of transnational allegiances. This focus on absent bodies becomes necessary for theorizing the ways in which melodrama is intimately connected to the biopolitical reality that founds modern sovereignty.[44]

The national imaginary that melodramatic narrative helps uphold depends as much on the ways it grafts belonging and its exclusions onto the body as it does on the way that the melodramatic mode organizes temporality and represents the past. My second chapter, "Costume Changes, Overlapping Histories: *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*," addresses the historical implications of melodramatic narratives that are arranged atemporally: cinematic works that explicitly acknowledge how mediated memory is an essential component for understanding how the melodramatic mode reconstructs history not as a way to access the past but rather to suggest how the past molds the present. Melodrama has been integral to propagating national narratives given its propensity to organize temporality in forward-moving fashion—where either victims and/or the truth are ultimately rescued or revealed. But also ingrained in melodrama's temporal articulations is its wish to reverse time, despite also acknowledging that such a wish is also an impossibility.[45]

The mode's reliance on tropes of excess and muteness can also work against certain narrative propensity to resolve conflicts. *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* employ both of these tropes as a way to undermine the coherence upon which the imagining of the nation depends. Rather than understand history to function chronologically, these global melodramas emphasize the imbrication of past and present. I argue that such films update melodrama's conventions for a post-national context by reflecting upon how one reconstructs history from the vantage point of rupture, discontinuity, echo, and repetition. The films' elliptical editing has been amply discussed as a source point for their atemporal structure. But, instead, I argue that the films' mise-en-scène is itself responsible for their atemporal understanding of history (from the costumes, to the clocks that

tell time at random, to the whispering holes, and to the short snippets of televised events that irrupt into the diegesis as if from some repressed past). The intricate patterns of the actresses' dresses and the lush textures of the settings are some examples of the stylistic elements that immediately allow us to identify the films as melodramas. There is something wholly excessive about the films' glossy aesthetic register. Yet, these "excessive" elements also point toward disparate layers of history that are embedded in the films. In fact, in the case of these films, melodrama is deployed as much for its ability to evoke the styles of the past as it is for the way in which it is equipped with a language for critiquing historical reconstruction per se.

I thus propose that the historical reality that brackets the making of both *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, the 1997 handover and the 2047 expiration date for the "one country, two systems" agreement, reveals that the films should be understood as meditations on the passing of time and the representation of history, rather than as nostalgic reveries. The films' obsessive focus on loss and repetition serves to acknowledge the irretrievable character of the past that nonetheless births the necessity to narrate and reconstruct it. At their core, each film thinks about the nature of the event: its contingent temporal character and the propensity to narrate and represent it through tropes of coincidence and repetition. The failed love affairs in the films illuminate the inevitable role that events in the past play in the reconstruction of history in and for the present. In particular, I look closely at the fragments of televised footage that situate the films' fictional narratives within a historical time and I argue that these moments are key to understanding how the films underscore the fact that the memory of historical events can only be mediated, recuperated from afar. Because the films employ atemporal narratives in order to investigate the terms upon which history is recorded and remembered, they belong in the company of films such as *Before the Rain* (1994), *Peppermint Candy* (1999), *Ararat* (2002), and *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006) (to name only a few films produced in different parts of the world). This is also a defining characteristic of some of the other films analyzed in other chapters such as *The Skin I Live In* and *Colossal Youth*, which also employ an atemporal narrative construction in order to interrogate the very construction of history as such.

The third chapter of the book, "Border-Crossing the Global Imaginary: *The Bubble* and *Babel*," deals with, as the title suggests, the issue of borders in the global era. It addresses both the reality of globalization's border crossing and questions the idea that it ultimately threatens (or promises) to erase them. Thus, this chapter investigates the tension between the nation as a spatially bounded entity and the idea of globalization as that which, in its being "unbound," threatens the sovereignty of the nation-state. Here,

I argue that the global imaginary is not limitless, despite the purported borderlessness of globalization, and neither is it dissociated from the nation, despite its claim to supersede it. In the midst of this global landscape, the nation remains an entity that spans a finite territory and that ascribes to a linear temporality. The global imagination, for its part, needs the nation as a repository of backwardness in order to usurp the mantle of modernity from it.

For this purpose, this chapter analyzes two films that, although they initially seem to present progressive, global narratives, in the end, they violently reinscribe limited national parameters that reassert reactionary modes of representation. *Babel* and *The Bubble* mobilize melodrama in the service of reinstating the kinds of exclusions around belonging that propel national ideology. *Babel* interweaves three different narrative strands that are set in three different regions of the world (the Mexico/US border, Morocco, and Japan) as a way to dramatize our global connectivity. Like *Babel*, *The Bubble* also acknowledges human ability to connect across borders. Its story is a present-day rendering of a well-worn melodramatic trope: a love that can transcend borders, particularly given the entrenched geopolitics of the region. *The Bubble* presents us with a gay love affair between an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian man, but despite the ethos of hope and inclusion that the film sets in motion, it ultimately gives their love no way out of the ideologies that confine them. As in the case of *Babel*, the wish for community and belonging that drives the melodrama of *The Bubble* will also disintegrate at the border. The films prove that the borderlessness of globalization is often mostly imaginary, whereas the production of stateless subjects is not. The emphasis on Israeli occupation in *The Bubble* along with the visceral presence of the Mexican-US border in *Babel* locate the films' representations within a global geopolitics that has perpetuated conditions of "statelessness," of people dispossessed of rights and citizenship. Immigration and the Occupied Territories are paradigmatic examples of this mode of statelessness.[46]

My final chapter, "Melodrama and Global Neorealism: *Colossal Youth* and *The World*," takes up the issue of melodrama's relationship to realism. Melodrama's relationship to realism is predicated on its insistence on pressing the surface of reality in its search for meaning, often seeking to reveal social injustice. Documentary-like aesthetics in fiction film, such as those first espoused by Italian neorealism, share the same interest. For this reason, I argue that neorealist narratives and aesthetics need to be understood as manifestations of, not deviations from, the melodramatic mode. Neorealism needs to be comprehended as a counter-ideological style of melodrama. Many films of the global era blur the line between documentary and fiction and in so doing they follow in the tradition of neorealism.

Colossal Youth and *The World*, the films at the center of this chapter, have embraced the aims of the Italian neorealist project and updated them to suit their specific cultural and sociopolitical conditions. Realism in these films is deployed as a means to shed light on the underclasses that urban renewal projects have produced, as cities such as Lisbon and Beijing have pushed to join ranks with a cosmopolitan network of global cities. In particular, they address a central economic concern of our time: the rise of global capital, and the way it displaces and disenfranchises certain subjects. Whereas the films discussed in the first two chapters openly align themselves with the aesthetics of theater, the films in this chapter aim to strip themselves of artificiality, looking to let reality speak for itself. Yet, rather than move away from melodrama's concerns, these are films that remain deeply invested in the project of rendering injustice both legible and palpable. Thus, *Colossal Youth* and *The World* provide a template for how to understand the ways in which melodramatic language is reoriented in the guise of a realist aesthetic. The role of suffering, but particularly the recognition of suffering, becomes central to the project of envisioning a just and moral (global) world.

Something that distinguishes global neorealist films from the postwar films produced in Italy has to do with how the city and the people who are forced to live in them are represented as being out of phase with each other, as if the question were no longer about how to make cities livable again but, rather, about how to continue to live when the surrounding landscape has in effect become uninhabitable. These films are at once about immigration, dislocation, and economic disenfranchisement as well as stories that condemn the failed revolutionary projects of the past. And hence, the decay and devastation that *Colossal Youth* and *The World* present has no longer anything to do with the destruction brought about by war but rather with the kind of urban renewal that befits a neoliberal image of the cosmopolitan city. Each of these films thus specifically addresses the effects of globalization by focusing on state-sanctioned developments that only work to further alienate those already marginalized by the global economy. In these films, the world remains at a tantalizing remove, while the people whose lives they capture remain imprisoned in dead-end situations. I locate the insistence on the suffering body in postwar and global melodrama as one that derives from the representations of imperiled bodies in turn-of-the-century melodrama, which staged the dangers that an increasingly mechanized and industrialized landscape posed on the human body.[47] Finally, not entirely leaving the histrionics of melodrama behind, the locus of an excess of expression is, as it has classically been in melodrama, the films' mise-en-scène. Through their respective mise-en-scène, each of the films creates an incongruous juxtaposition between

the lives of their protagonists and the landmarks of our cosmopolitan existence.

Global Melodrama thus addresses a dual concern: it both investigates the ways in which melodrama represents the experience of globalization and tracks how the realities of globalization—its technological, cultural, political, and economic transformations—have required melodrama to reconfigure its parameters and conventions as it continues to be an interface through which we come to grasp the significance of our lived experience. Melodrama has always acknowledged that bodies are both mediums for narrative and entities inscribed by narrative. Globalization, for its part, ensnares our bodies in its elaborate matrix of capital and information flows. Imagined as a borderless phenomenon, globalization nonetheless institutes borders everywhere, as new patterns of movement and migration reorganize the global map into those it privileges and those it disadvantages. Globalization thus produces bodies both freed and bound by its virtual networks as well as ones constrained to actual territories by the very same forces that propel its deterritorializations—a term that describes the phenomenon whereby we are increasingly disembedded from place as we negotiate, in our daily lives, local contexts traversed by global elements that have altered our relationship to time and space. Placing melodrama and globalization together thus produces a curious and paradoxical juxtaposition: a pervasive mode predicated on embodiment meets one that thrives on disembodied transactions. Through the lens of melodrama, even the current failures of the nation provide horizons for new imaginings.

1

Biopolitical Embodiments: *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In*

Infused with the sense that life and theater are only a heartbeat away from each other, Pedro Almodóvar's films fully embody the melodramatic ethos. Almodóvar's films have insistently made the point that the purely illusory medium of film is the director's only recourse to representing the world and its emotive register—that which we may otherwise call reality. Melodrama understands reality theatrically, which is a way of saying that melodrama acknowledges that reality is inaccessible beyond the modes we have for representing it—for making reality's representation visible and rendering that visibility legible. In Almodóvar's films, a performance is often staged within the course of a given film, an element that the director uses to highlight his sense that performance is an integral part of every day life. Thus, taking a page from Douglas Sirk, and pushing it a little further, Almodóvar's films overflow with the knowledge that life is to be found in its imitation. As many critics of the director's work have noted, and Almodóvar himself has often acknowledged, he inherits his characteristic penchant for a subversive style of melodrama from directors such as Sirk, R. W. Fassbinder, and Luis Buñuel.[1] At the same time, Almodóvar also pays homage to a long tradition of on- and offscreen melodrama, including that of classical-era Hollywood. In doing so, he has pioneered his own, idiosyncratic mode of melodrama, one that ranges from the painstaking attention to decor, which makes his films instantly recognizable, to the elaborate plots that intersect multiple stories, narrative twists, and characters' fates. He has, throughout the course of his prolific career, mounted a thorough investigation into the ways in which artifice can occasion true emotion, and has explored the ways that emotion, in turn, can breathe life into artifice.

In all of this, bodies remain the essential vehicles for performance and emotional expression.

Turning to the body as an expressive vehicle, melodrama creates an interface between reality and its representation, something that Almodóvar has used to critique the normative social and political structures that sustain the national imagination—particularly around the representation of gender. Because melodrama acknowledges the body as the place where meaning is grounded, it can effectively reveal the inner workings of power and ideology. This is the fundamental reason that melodrama supports the imagining of the nation, and why the form itself can likewise work to subvert, revise, or recreate the national imaginary. At stake, in short, is how we imagine communities with and through the body. By imagining new configurations of gendered identity, interpersonal relationships, and familial arrangements, Almodóvar's films, through the 1980s and 1990s, upturned Spain's heteronormative structures. Yet, the social and political realities of globalization have necessitated a different mode of critique that goes beyond issues of national representation. In this chapter, I argue that as our understanding of how bodies are intersected by the matrix of power has changed, so too has Almodóvar's approach to representing the body. In other words, if modes of resistance were once accessible by way of challenging dominant categories of representation, particularly around identity, it has increasingly become a less effective tactic for addressing the ways in which meaning and bodies interact on the surface of the screen. In this respect, film in general, but film melodrama in particular, given its emphasis on embodiment, finds itself at a decisive crossroads.

Talk to Her/*Hable con ella* (2002) and *The Skin I Live In*/*La piel que habito* (2011) are films that, respectively, introduce and conclude (at least for now) a new vein of preoccupation in the director's films. I am particularly interested in the fact that, in these films, the conjuncture of theater and life finds its place in a medicalized environment, where the distinction between life and theater collapses onto the body itself. *The Skin I Live In*, which places the biotechnological reality of the cloning of human skin at the center of its narrative, clearly raises the stakes for what it means for life to imitate life. *Talk to Her*, for its part, hovers over the body of a comatose woman such that the film's drama and narrative suspense hinge on the question of whether she will awaken, or whether her state is already one akin to death. I claim that the medical setting of these films brings the connection between life and theater, and, alongside it, the director's continued critique of sovereign power vis-à-vis melodrama, to a new threshold: one that acknowledges the biopolitical reality of the bodies we inhabit.[2]

Biopolitics points to the intrinsic merger between life and politics; it marks the body as the new frontier for power given that the inner structures

of organisms have become new territories to conquer and exploit. The French Revolution, the very same period to which Michel Foucault has traced the rise of biopower, also coincides with melodrama's origin point—and thus the "expressivity" of the melodramatic body needs to also be understood within this context. Biopower, in Foucault's terms, refers to a shift when "[p]ower would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied to the level of life itself."[3] The field of signification and meaning is grounded upon the dispersal of power across a matrix composed of ordinary bodies charged with demarcating the contours of sovereignty. And, for melodrama's purposes, the existence of a territory that extends, either metaphorically or literally, beyond the body's surface places new pressure on the assertion that "[r]ather than displacing the political by the personal, melodrama produces the body and the interpersonal domain as the sites in which the socio-political stakes its struggles."[4] The hospital in *Talk to Her* and the illicit laboratory and operating theater in *The Skin I Live In* become the stage from which Almodóvar projects a new understanding of the body and identity for the twenty-first century, and, alongside it, a new mode for imagining community. The films thus update the parameters of melodramatic narrative in order to get to the root of the lived sociopolitical dynamics of human embodiment. Through this cinematic reconfiguration of the body, the director continues to figure and critique the nation, except that now it is by other means: by revealing the biopolitical underpinnings of the modern body, these films open up the possibility of critiquing not just national parameters, but those of modern sovereignty as such.

The modes in which Almodóvar has represented the body and identity on screen have largely been understood as both reworking and reimagining Spanish national identity. From the beginning of his filmmaking career, dating to the late 1970s and early 1980s, the director's cinematic worlds have unapologetically placed all that might have existed at the margins of Spanish society at its center and, in doing so, contributed to the metamorphosis of a country hungry to emerge from the economic backwardness and the social repression that the almost 40 years of Francisco Franco's rule imposed. As if his films truly had conjuring powers, the new reality spawned by his imagination was not only splashed across the screen in primary colors, but on occasion it became inspiration for a true transformation of the country's social and cultural landscape, one that fairly soon thereafter came to be perceived as both modern and permissive. It is not an exaggeration to say that the director became, sometimes to the chagrin of his detractors at home, Spain's best known, post-Franco cultural ambassador. As the bulk of critical work on his films has pointed out,

the early films helped produce a new image and new narrative for post-Francoist Spain, "reinventing" or "refiguring" the nation.[5] Yet, Spain itself quickly became a global player and one of the largest economies in the world—its now beleaguered economy stands as testament to its unchecked expansion.[6] Given this rapidly changing socioeconomic and political context, either what there is to reinvent or refigure is not as prominent a question, or the issue of how to reimagine the nation is, almost three decades later, by necessity different.

Almodóvar's trajectory as a filmmaker, as much as he is associated with the liberatory moment that gave rise to *la Movida*, has in fact straddled many important national transitions. The director himself has gone from underground filmmaking and singing sensation to becoming an internationally acclaimed director. Through the decades, the tone and mood of his films has changed, undoubtedly a mark of his own maturation both as an individual and as an artist, yet these tonal and thematic shifts also reflect the changing tides of the social and economic landscape of the country that became inextricably connected to the rise and fall of the global economy. Moreover, as Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki note, the Almodóvar team, comprised as well by the director's brother and producer Agustín, has skilfully taken advantage of new opportunities for distribution linked to the rise of the global film festival circuit, which has made his films commercially viable even while they have retained their independent production structure and idiosyncratic authorial signature.[7] If we take melodrama to be a mode that effectively straddles and mediates social, cultural, and political change, then Almodóvar's cinematic output in the 30 years following the demise of Franco's regime provides a rich lens through which to track shifting modes of melodramatic representation.

Almodóvar released *Talk to Her* in 2002, around the same time that he began writing the script for *The Skin I Live In*.[8] This time period coincides with the rise and consolidation of a movement that culminated in the passing of the Historical Memory Law/*Ley de Memoria Histórica* in 2007.[9] The law's purpose is to collect testimonies from the victims of Franco's regime, but, most importantly, it makes the government responsible for excavating and identifying, through DNA, the bodies of those executed who were dumped in mass graves. Thus, as the movement that propelled the passing of the law took root in Spain, Almodóvar's films also became inflected by an obsession with the past, something from which the director's films had once recoiled. This new willingness to acknowledge and resurrect the past is evident in the narrative construction of films that, starting with *Talk to Her*, begin to preference a complex flashback structure. This is not to say that the director has not previously employed flashbacks in his films, but flashbacks such as those in *Labyrinth of Passion*/*Laberinto de pasiones*

(1982) and *High Heels/Tacones lejanos* (1991), for example, do not disrupt the films' linear chronology and mainly serve the purpose of exposition. Instead, with the exception of *Volver*, from *Talk to Her* to *The Skin I Live In*, flashbacks become a structural component of Almodóvar's films' narration. And even *Volver*'s chronological narrative betrays the desire for the return of the past, as suggested by the title of the film ("to return") and by the story of a "dead" mother who lives as a ghost in the present.[10] Finally, as the ghostly trope might suggest, this new interest in acknowledging and addressing the past also assumes the form of absent bodies somehow made present, or present bodies that in some way bear the mark of absence. This present-yet-absent trope in effect registers an anxiety around those disappeared bodies that historical memory might leave behind. In what follows, I investigate the role of the absent body and its link to a postwar incarnation of sovereignty, one that legitimizes a permanent state of exception founded on, and enacted as, genocide. In fact, I claim that *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* explicitly probe the new "matter" of bodies in the context of a global environment that is increasingly predicated on violence.

If Benedict Anderson is correct when he states that communities are to be distinguished by the style in which they are imagined,[11] then what is the effect of this reconfiguring of the imagination in the director's films, especially vis-à-vis how the body is represented, or how it fails to be wholly represented, on screen? As an imaginative mode, melodrama shares an intimate, if not integral, link to what Anderson has identified as the imagining of community. In *The Skin I Live In*, Vera's (Elena Anaya) transgenic skin is made up of much more than just a melding of human and pig DNA: the film sutures into the organic junctions of Vera's skin the sociopolitical and historical conditions that have made her gorgeous, burns-resistant surface possible, one that, moreover, serves as an "organic" cover to a body, Vicente's (Jan Cornet), otherwise made absent.[12] Vera's skin is imagined as immune to destruction, resistant to burns and insect bites (particularly of the malaria-carrying mosquito). The wish for skin's immunity betrays an awareness of a larger sociopolitical context that is increasingly predicated on violence.[13] On the one hand, it is a fantasy that responds to the wish that we may remain invulnerable in a world permeated by violence. On the other hand, as Priscilla Wald has argued, the notion of immunity lies at the core of what constitutes us as a community; it gets to the heart of the bonds that have the power to bind us together or destroy us.[14] In *Talk to Her*, by contrast, Alicia (Leonor Watling) is a figure of outmost vulnerability—even in her awakened state she exudes fragility (which includes her lack of knowledge of the events that led to her "returning" to life). The logic that calls for the ways in which life constituted as vulnerable necessitates defense is the same one that places immunity at the core of how our social

and political interactions have been imagined.[15] The tropes of immunity and vulnerability that these films deploy are central to the way these films conjure their images of community and interpersonal connection as well as to how they investigate the juridico-medical complex and its role in delimiting the contours of the body in relationship to sociality.

My focus in this chapter will be twofold. First, I will address the role of interdependence as it is experienced organically through bodies, such that it permits for an imagining of community, not only national but transnational in scope. Second, I investigate the films' insistence on bodies that are simultaneously present and absent: Alicia's (in *Talk to Her*) and Vicente/Vera's (in *The Skin I Live In*). Finally, I will demonstrate how the tropes of immunity and violence that both of these films stage are intertwined themes that speak to the preoccupations brought about by our increased global interconnectivity. The theme of interdependence is more evident in *Talk to Her*, while the trope of the present/absent body, even if introduced in *Talk to Her*, takes on the full weight of its political implication in *The Skin I Live In*.

Given that narrating the intricate, multilayered plot of each film could prove a lengthy enterprise, I will only briefly outline the plot points that directly concern my analysis of the films. *Talk to Her* tells the story of a woman, Alicia, who has been in a coma for three years at a hospital where she is cared for by a team of doctors and nurses. From the outset of the film, one nurse's tireless dedication stands out, Benigno (Javier Cámara), who speaks to her as if she were fully conscious. He is almost self-sacrificingly devoted to her care (taking on night shifts from other nurses). But, as we slowly come to find out, he also happens to be living under the delusion that he and Alicia are a couple. One day, Benigno attends a dance performance at a theater (the film opens with this scene) where, by coincidence, he is sitting next to a man named Marco (Darío Grandinetti). Marco is affected by the performance on stage, and Benigno is subsequently affected by watching Marco's emotional reaction. This is an anecdote, like many others, that he also later shares with Alicia. Once again, by coincidence, Marco ends up at the same hospital where Benigno cares for Alicia when his lover Lydia (Rosario Flores), a bullfighter, is gored during a corrida. She, too, falls into a coma. Given that their days are spent mostly at the hospital, Marco and Benigno become friends. One day, the doctor in charge discovers that Alicia is pregnant. Benigno is not only the most likely suspect, but we realize in retrospect that he has in fact raped Alicia (as it turns out, right under our eyes, without our knowledge). The rape occurs during one of his evening chats with her: he recounts the plot of a silent film that he has seen at the cinema. Almodóvar covers over the rape by cutting away from the scene at the hospital to the film within the film that is the

subject of Benigno's narration, "The Shrinking Lover" (a film also directed by Almodóvar in the style of German Expressionism). Benigno ends up in jail for this act, where soon thereafter he commits suicide. Unbeknownst to Benigno, Alicia miscarries the pregnancy and awakes in the process. At film's end, it is Alicia who ends up at a theatrical performance, where, by chance, she meets Marco who is also in attendance. The film closes elliptically with the suggestion that there remains a story, yet to be told, about Marco and Alicia.[16]

The Skin I Live In supplants the likable, somewhat benign psychopath represented by Benigno (at least insofar as his own cluelessness about his actions is concerned) with the vengefully driven, wholly psychopathic, albeit brilliant, Dr. Robert Ledgard (Antonio Banderas). Dr. Ledgard is a Brazilian plastic surgeon who, after the death of his wife, Gal, moves to Madrid with his daughter, Norma (Blanca Suárez), and his housekeeper, Marilia (Marisa Paredes)—who unbeknownst to him is also his mother. Dr. Ledgard has an illicit laboratory and operating theater in the basement of his Toledo Villa. There, he obsessively labors to perfect human-pig skin grafts, which he is genetically engineering to be resistant both to burns and insect bites. Inside this same villa, he holds a woman captive. The film opens at a point where Vera has been his prisoner for six years. Vera's fate as Dr. Ledgard's guinea pig is to be the test subject upon which he grafts various versions of the cloned skin (which he has nicknamed "Gal"). Late in the course of the film, we come to the shocking realization that Vera was once Vicente, a young man who raped Dr. Ledgard's daughter and who, as a punishment for his transgression, was abducted by the doctor and subjected to a forced sex reassignment surgery.[17] One day, Zeca (who, Ledgard also does not know, is his own half-brother) arrives at the villa; Zeca happens upon Vera, and proceeds to rape her. Ledgard surprises him mid-rape and kills him. From that moment on, she gains Ledgard's trust and lives with him as his lover. And thus the act of rape is responsible both for Vicente's imprisonment and Vera's newfound (limited) freedom. One night, Vera manages to kill both Ledgard and Marilia. She finally escapes from the villa and returns "home" to her mother's clothing store. Here, Vicente reveals his identity both to his mother and to the store's attendant, a woman he had once fancied but who had rejected him because of his gender. Thus, not unlike *Talk to Her*, the film ends with a potential new (love) story to tell.

Both films are organized around an accounting for time that has passed, which the narrative eventually addresses (the three years that precede the opening where we find Alicia already in a coma, and the six years of Vicente's abduction/disappearance that have led to our first meeting him as Vera). Furthermore, each film concludes with a scene that demands a

recognition, activating the "too late"/"in the nick of time" temporal trope of melodrama, almost simultaneously. Finally, and most importantly, the films insist upon an inherent violence that structures social reality. This violence is given form in the films by way of the rapes and the forced sex change. The films suggest that this interplay forged between bodies and violence, and/or bodies and their care (the other side of the same coin), is the inescapable base from where community needs to be reimagined.

A New "Matter" of Bodies: The Medical Setting

Talk to Her opens during a theater performance of Pina Bausch's *Cafe Müller*. The first shot of the film is a close-up of one of the dancers. From the start, then, the camera is already firmly ensconced within the proscenium space, announcing its narrative position as one straddling that threshold. Two somnambulist women wander around a stage that is peppered with chairs. Yet, on stage too, is a man who moves around, almost frantically, removing the chairs from the women's way, lest they trip over them. A shot reverse shot between the stage and the audience reveals Benigno and Marco, sitting next to each other, watching this performance. Marco is visibly moved. In the midst of this opening scene, we suddenly hear a voice-off narrating the events that we are witnessing taking place on and off stage (the women's dancing, Marco's crying). The sound bridge that initiates in the theater space then takes us, just as suddenly, to a hospital room. We realize the voice that provides the sound bridge is Benigno's; he is now in his nurse's scrubs at a hospital bedside and is speaking to someone who, for a moment, remains off screen. Slowly, the camera pans to reveal that the person he is tending is Alicia, in a coma.

This opening sequence establishes a connection between the somnambulist women and Alicia, their consciousness withdrawn, and between the theater space and the hospital room: one a place that calls for embodiment, the "inhabiting" of a character, the other one a place where the fact that one is a body in need of care and cure is inescapable. The temporal ellipsis sutures the space between theater and hospital. Benigno is Alicia's "life support," and his narrative voice, used as connective tissue, becomes an anchoring point for the film's audience: from its start, the film invites us to identify with Benigno's point of view, which is one of the reasons that his rape of Alicia, despite its being kept off screen, can prove to be so upsetting to its viewers. In fact, a central characteristic of both films is that they construct spectatorial identification in such a way as to implicate the viewer in their acts of violence. At one point shortly after the introduction of Alicia into the narrative, the camera gives us a lingering over-the-head shot of her body supine on the hospital bed: first, the camera cuts to a completely

Figure 1.1 Alicia, *Talk to Her*

blank screen, which we soon realize is a white bedsheet that slowly comes to mold the contours of Alicia's body across the whole span of the screen. For a moment, screen and body are one and the same, a cinematic gesture that invites the viewer to consider how the materiality of bodies is captured and affixed by the substrate that also captures the images we see screened. The sheet is slowly and carefully pulled back to reveal Alicia's face and we realize that what we are witnessing is a dressing ritual, whereby an off-white hospital slip (resembling that of the somnambulist women on stage) is placed over her head and body as the sheet is pulled away from her body (figure 1.1). This sequence unambiguously announces that there is something beyond the surface play of femininity and its performance, for so long a trope associated with Almodóvar's films, which this film is after. The shift that takes place between the theater and the hospital, beyond pointing us to modes of being in bodies, can also be taken to signal a transition in modes of representing the body on screen: from the theatricalization of identity (acknowledging that identity is performative) to a kind of pure embodied state that does not resolve the question of identity for us (does Alicia possess an identity while she is in a coma?).

The Skin I Live In foregrounds the question of embodiment starting with its title. Yet, its connection to *Talk to Her* is not only thematic but visual as well.[18] *The Skin I Live In* is a generic hybrid, a horror melodrama about how bodies have become pliable and about how surfaces belie what palpitates beneath them. Early in the introduction of the doctor and his illicit laboratory, the camera similarly holds its attention in an over-the-head shot of a female mannequin's body. Her skin is marked off into segments by a black marker, in the manner of a tailor's pattern (figure 1.2). The camera lingers over this image, soon inviting us to observe in close-up how the

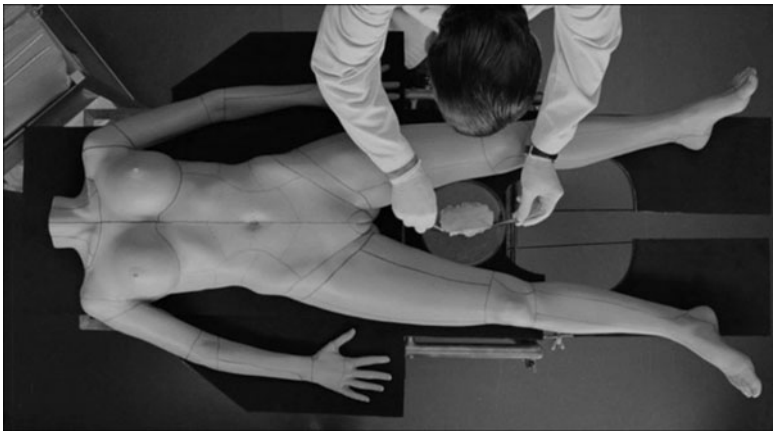

Figure 1.2 Mannequin, *The Skin I Live In*

doctor's latex-clad hands painstakingly stretch and mold a piece of translucent material—the genetically modified skin—onto one of the demarcated segments. We are thus made privy to a scene that is somewhat of a dress rehearsal, but theater and life, in this case, share an organic connection: the pattern drawn on the skin is a blueprint that will later be visible as scars on Vera's body. The notion that melodrama pressures the surface of the visual field in its quest to produce meaning suddenly takes on eerie implications.[19]

The Skin I Live In thus deploys melodrama's expressive universe in order to account for the ways in which biology itself has become permeated by technology and the dynamics of power that drive it. In the case of this film, the operating theater has literally replaced the stage—a move foreshadowed by the way that *Talk to Her* had already paralleled the space of the theater with that of the hospital. Stretched across the full reach of the frame, the skin alludes to a depth that the camera cannot access and, in so doing, also announces the limits of representation. If melodrama once turned to the stage as a means to represent social reality, whereby the body was employed to dramatize ideological positions, then, in the case of this film, the body itself is revealed as the stage where identity and power intertwine.

The overhead shot by which the mannequin in *The Skin I Live In* is introduced bears a clear stylistic resemblance to the way that Alicia's body in *Talk to Her* is also shot from overhead. Yet, the difference between the inanimate mannequin and the comatose Alicia also distinguishes the thematic focus of each film.[20] The mannequin in *The Skin I Live In*,

which presents compartmentalized segments, underlines Ledgard's obsessive control (in a story about the abuses of power). Alicia's body, instead, pulsates with unknown vitality, thereby foregrounding the question of how we distinguish between life and death. In Vera's case, the biopolitical reality is inextricably etched onto her own skin: Vera is literally a product of biomedical advances given that she has not only been made the recipient of cloned skin (tailor-made to "suit" her) but Vicente had to first be subjected to a forced sex change operation. Alicia's prostrate body, by contrast, mystifies scientific knowledge and technology. The question of whether she is alive or dead and the inability of science to explain how or why it is that comatose patients "come back" to life cloak Alicia's presence in mystery: all the while we are made acutely aware of an "interiority" we cannot access.

Despite their different circumstances, both of these bodies confound classification, generating an ontological conundrum. Vera is and is not a transsexual, and Alicia is and is not alive (she has been declared medically brain dead).[21] Both characters thus exist at the boundary of what is wholly intelligible either in medical terms (Alicia), or in terms of gendered identification (Vicente/Vera). In this manner, the films reveal their being firmly rooted in an understanding of the body as an entity that is at once constrained by power and pulsates with the capacity to exceed it.[22] This ontological ambiguity, the ways in which bodies can straddle the known and the unknown, the inside and the outside of what is culturally circumscribed, is crucial in understanding the ways in which Almodóvar's films employ the melodramatic mode to both critique social limits while simultaneously imagining the possibility of a more inclusive community. Drawing further connection between the themes of these films and their relationship to a biopolitical imaginary, it is useful to take into account how Giorgio Agamben traces, in *Homo Sacer*, a connection between the technologies of life support that made possible maintaining comatose patients alive and the concurrent development of transplant technology. He argues that this conflation of technological developments was integral to redefining the concept of death by turning it into a shadowy zone of meaning that required legal intervention in order to establish its definition: a process that inevitably led to death's politicization.[23]

Through its foregrounding of a comatose figure, *Talk to Her* manifests, as Marsha Kinder has suggested, "new ways of mobilizing the body to represent social, political, and generic change."[24] In *The Skin I Live In*, Vicente's forced sex reassignment surgery only ups the ante for this new mode of imagining the body. In discussing what she terms Almodóvar's "brain-dead" trilogy, in which she includes *The Flower of My Secret*/*La flor de mi secreto* (1995) and *All about My Mother*/*Todo sobre mi madre* (1999), Kinder argues that *Talk to Her* is both the film that culminates the

trilogy and where this trope becomes fully expressed. Kinder contends that a minor organ transplant subplot in the first two films becomes the central premise of *Talk to Her*.[25] She argues that the scenes that begin both *The Flower of My Secret* and *All about My Mother*, which both involve the making of training videos of doctor-patient scenarios for the request of organ donation, speak to the interplay between fiction and life.[26] In Kinder's view, the films each represent a progressive move from pruning away "dead-end" structures, to considering the regenerative power of transplants, and, finally, to inscribing the brain-dead trope as a gesture of resuscitation. For Kinder, the brain-dead/transplant trope illustrates the way in which an emphasis on gender as cultural construction begins to be replaced with an interest in intersubjectivity. Thus, she sees this trans-subjective organization of the body as expressly moving away from the kind of gender mutability and sexual mobility that had characterized Almodóvar's earlier films.[27] She concludes that Almodóvar's "brain-dead scenarios imply that Spain's imaginary of mobile transgressive sexuality and nurturing maternal voices, which he helped make central to its cinema, has a curative power to offer the rest of the world, particularly in an age of mindless, brain-dead violence."[28]

By beginning with *Talk to Her*, I would like to start where Kinder's argument leaves off. With the benefit of hindsight, I take *Talk to Her* to be at once the film in which the medical trope culminates but also the one that most explicitly introduces the motif of the presence-absence of bodies, which, as I mentioned earlier, will appear in all of the director's subsequent films. Even though it is true that the organ transplant/brain-dead trope is most evident in the films that Kinder analyzes, medical environments (whether they are explicitly hospitals or not) have been a recurrent presence from the beginning of Almodóvar's filmography. During the opening sequence of *Labyrinth of Passion*, for example, we are introduced to a doctor who has cloned parakeets. An anecdote confined to the film's opening, the cloning story mainly functions as a comedic aside, whereby the asexual cloning of parakeets alludes to the doctor's own fear of sex. Nonetheless, this moment introduces, almost shockingly early in the director's filmography, the trope of life imitating life. Not until thirty years later does *The Skin I Live In* take up the subject of cloning as a central narrative interest.[29] Despite the otherwise stark differences between them, the bedside scene of *Law of Desire* can be considered a precursor to *Talk to Her*'s theme of a consciousness withdrawn that might yet awaken. In the case of *Law of Desire*, the subject is memory loss. Pablo Quintero (Eusebio Poncela) has lost his memory following an accident and is convalescing at a Madrid hospital; his transsexual sister Tina (Carmen Maura) comes to visit him and pleads with him to recover his memory. She tells him about their family's past, a

convoluted story that intersects incest, self-imposed exile, a medical procedure (the sex change), and her eventual return to Madrid. Tina's frustration around Pablo's inability to remember throws into relief her sense that one's identity is dependent on a shared history: "Your amnesia leaves me without a past, if you don't recover your memory I will go mad." The fact that such a scene takes place in a hospital room further props up the sense that such shared bonds are life sustaining.[30]

At the same time, the connection that *Law of Desire* draws between memory, identity, the past, and transsexuality also reveals this film to be a precursor to *The Skin I Live In*. In fact, it introduces this particular constellation of concerns, which are revisited in films such as *High Heels*, *All about My Mother*, and, particularly, *Bad Education/La mala educación* (2004). In the case of *Bad Education*, Spain's past is filtered through Ignacio's absent body (he is already dead at the start of the film's narrative). Ignacio is the young schoolboy through whose story we enter the past (1960s Spain): he is abused by a priest at the Catholic boarding school he attends, the same priest who in a fit of jealousy cuts short his budding interest in a fellow schoolmate, Enrique. Later in life, Ignacio blackmails the same priest for the money he intends to use to modify his transgendered body only to end up murdered by his own brother and the now ex-priest. Ignacio is the film's figure of irreparable loss, and his absent body motivates the narrative's search for truth, one that jumps us forward and back in time—as if the transsexual body itself were the means through which it becomes possible to represent such temporal involutions, an example of what Elizabeth Freeman has called "temporal drag."[31] Thus, the temporal puzzle that organizes *Bad Education* is intimately connected to Ignacio's own, transsexual body.[32]

Like Ignacio's body in *Bad Education*, Vera's body is one that speaks to how the past lives on in the present. Yet, whereas *Bad Education* makes its connection to Spain's Francoist past explicit, *The Skin I Live In*'s connections to history function obliquely, and, in so doing, the film constructs an allegorical universe that not only addresses Spain under Franco but, as I will argue, also serves to generate a transnational and trans-temporal critique of sovereign power itself. Vera's transsexual body functions as a node for the film's articulation of intersecting discourses: between embodiment and identity, a political history predicated on violence, and an ethical conundrum that binds a sense of self, community, and historical continuity. The movement from the theater to the hospital thus signals a change in modes of capturing the body's meaning-making function. The body, on the one hand, is still recognized in its performative capacity within the field of representation. This is a reason that the transgendered body can still serve to undermine, or at the very least complicate, normative conceptions

of identity. On the other hand, Alicia's comatose state hints at, and Vera's troublesome transsexuality confirms, the limitations inherent in discourses of representation.

Encircling Worlds: The Melodramatic Ending and the Imagining of Community

This novel materiality of bodies that *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* project (in the context of Almodóvar's filmography) has implications for the way in which the past comes to inform the foundation of a new kind of imagined community. A distinctive element of the director's early films was their flair for heralding a new world merely by projecting it as an already-constituted fact on screen. Instead, these later films posit its possibility in the future, its latent potential signaled by Alicia's and Vera's uncategorizable bodies as well as by the open-ended conclusions that hint at new beginnings, ones yet to materialize on screen. The endings of these films, then, not only insist upon how deeply violence is engrained into our present social fabric but they also suggest that whatever form sociability may take in an unknown, imagined future, it has to come to terms with this reality. The films' acknowledgment of a future that must be forged despite violent pasts, impossible to merely surpass or exorcise, bears the mark of the unbridgeable political divisions that Spain's civil war and Franco's repressive government left in their wake. In these films, the acknowledgment of loss becomes the precondition for a movement into the future that imagines a community constituted otherwise.

In *Talk to Her*, the withdrawal of consciousness, accompanied by a time of convalescence, tells us something about a wish that Alicia's "cure" may yet bring a new consciousness into being. Vera's sentence, lived out in the prison cell where Ledgard holds her, is constituted both as a time of waiting (for an escape) and a time of convalescence, since Vicente has had to heal from the many medical interventions that have been perpetrated on his body. Moreover, the ending of each film is bittersweet: they each hold out the promise of romance (Marco and Alicia; Vera and Cristina), but one that, if it is to be lived, will have to happen outside the diegetic frame of the story, as if both promising and withholding romance is the only gesture that allows for time and thus future possibility to remain open. And even then, the romances might only move forward once unspeakable and unimaginable truths have been acknowledged—the films propose this inescapable, irresolvable reality as the starting point for a new sociability, a way to imagine community anew.

At the end of *The Skin I Live In*, Vera kills her captors, escapes, and returns "home" to her mother's clothing store, the last place where she had

been seen when she lived as Vicente. The final reunion scene takes place six years after Vicente had mysteriously vanished; his mother has searched for him, refusing to accept the authorities' version of his disappearance. And thus, at its close, *The Skin I Live In* enacts the fantasy that a disappeared, abducted child may return. Here, the film resonates with the stories that increasingly began to emerge starting around 2008 of the "stolen lives" of children who were taken from their mothers at birth throughout the course of Franco's dictatorship and placed with families that sympathized with the regime. Most of these kidnappings occurred in hospitals linked to the Church.[33] In this context, the film's heart-wrenching reunion scene enacts much more than an isolated gesture of reparation as Vicente returns, albeit transformed. Vera, now escaped, walks into her mother's store. She first reveals herself to the attendant, Cristina, a woman with whom Vicente had flirted (and who, being a lesbian, was not interested in his advances). As mother and son stand face to face, the mother fails to recognize her own child. She recuperates her lost son, but she will yet have to come to terms with the loss of a fundamental part of Vicente, now forever lost. In the film's final medium shot, which frames all three women as they gaze at each other, the camera pauses as Vera struggles to speak until, finally, her words come: "*Soy Vicente*." Before his mother's recognition dawns, the screen falls to black, leaving her reaction offscreen, transferring the pathos—and the request for recognition—solely onto the film's audience. The reality of whatever future there is for Vera, and for the two women who stand as witnesses to Vicente's impossible return, must first move through painful and staggering acknowledgments of a past that now stands incarnated before them in the present—not to be shed nor surpassed.

Melodrama's fondness for masquerade, costume changes, and the last-minute revelation of identity, along with its propensity to rely on the transformation of a character's outward appearance to signal a cure, is here presented in a literally new incarnation. By leaving the space and place of recognition open ended, the film refuses restoration and closure. In so doing, what *The Skin I Live In* ultimately refuses is the violence of forgetfulness and coherence. Left before us is only the painful present left in the wake of an incomprehensible past. There is no order to be restored, no ultimate truth to be attained, no act of virtue to be gleamed nor rewarded. In this regard, the film does not provide a traditionally melodramatic resolution, and yet, in the tears that it elicits, it still does. Melodrama is a mode predicated on acknowledging, harnessing, and aiming to restore that which has been lost—it longs for a return to the lost time of innocence.[34] Yet, the lost time here in question shrouds a legacy of violence. As such, the ethical imperative that the film insists upon is not that of the recognition of innocence, as has traditionally been the case in melodrama, but merely the

recognition of the price we pay for the enduring forms of violence that continue to organize and sustain our social fabric—as true for a post-Franco Spain as it is for a global, post-9/11 context.

Talk to Her likewise indicates a traumatic history that is grafted onto the present, to be neither forgotten nor exorcised. The film implies that Alicia awakens due to the pregnancy caused by Benigno's rape. The child is stillborn, and Alicia is unaware of either the rape or the pregnancy. Marco, on the contrary, knows everything about what happened to Alicia. Alicia does not know, or, at least, does not in her newly awakened consciousness "remember," Marco (who had also interacted with her at the hospital while she convalesced).[35] At film's end, Marco and Alicia meet "by coincidence" at the same theater where Marco first met Benigno. The final intertitle of the film, which reads "Marco and Alicia," invites us to imagine a future romance. But, as Alicia's ballet teacher announces, because she, too, recognizes Marco from the hospital, a talk—difficult and unimaginable—will first need to happen. Reworking the more typical melodramatic convention that deploys the wish to recover a lost innocence, Alicia's innocence, instead, is that which will need to be shattered.

In her analysis of Almodóvar's use of coincidence in *Talk to Her*, Despina Kakoudaki has demonstrated how the trope reveals the epistemological and political ramifications of Almodóvar's work: coincidence is employed in the service of creating a complex moral landscape that is sustained through the recognition of an intimacy that exists among strangers, implying a connection based on a shared history. In fact, she claims that Almodóvar's deployment of the coincidence plot and how it constructs familiarity among strangers must be considered the director's fundamental narrative tendency.[36] Kakoudaki argues that "[coincidence] presents the desire for the formation and retention of common histories among strangers, in effect revealing a utopian desire for a sense of community that is both political and emotional."[37] The ethical imperative revolves around the necessary and fundamental recognition of otherness (that very thing which Benigno fails to do).[38] In this regard, the ethos of *The Skin I Live In* is slightly different, yet we can consider it the other side of the same coin: the drama of recognition at film's end takes place within the family, people who already know each other. And thus, at its close, *The Skin I Live In* ponders the dilemma of having someone become strange to those intimate, which is a reversal of the trope in *Talk to Her*—yet in both cases the recognition of "otherness" is made central to the films' conclusions. The reversal of the trope underlines Almodóvar's wide-ranging concern for how community and sociality are constructed and represented. In both of these cases, part of what astonishes (shocks us, gets us to pause, elicits our tears) is the need to acknowledge a past that has left visceral marks on the body of the present.

And, as Brooks reminds us, "[t]he melodramatic moment of astonishment is a moment of ethical evidence and recognition," and because recognition is never finally assured, it must be repeatedly dramatized.[39]

As Benedict Anderson influentially argued, the reason a community can be described as "imagined" depends, precisely, on the notion that we are somehow connected to perfect strangers—"the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[40] This imagined communion, moreover, is predicated on a distinct understanding of temporality, particularly that of the simultaneity of temporal coincidence: the notion of the "meanwhile" that was structured, in Anderson's view, by both the eighteenth-century novel and newspaper.[41] This is a concept that has now been expanded to include electronic media and migration across borders, which can also connect diasporic and otherwise supranational communities.[42] As Arjun Appadurai argues, "such [electronic] media transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds."[43] Melodrama's narrative strategy of forging coincidences (as unrealistic as it may sometimes seem) hyperbolizes and makes literal the idea that we are all embedded in society and thus already invisibly connected.[44] Thus, Anderson's formulation of the nation as an imagined community, one forged on the logic of simultaneity and coincidence, is an important lens through which we can understand the insistence on coincidences among strangers that we find present in so many melodramatic plots. And, because the imagination is the place where narrative and the national imaginary intersect, the use of the coincidence plot becomes necessary to the process of reimagining or reorganizing community.

More recently, one of the ways in which the connection among strangers has been rethought in the context of our globalized environment is Priscilla Wald's work on narratives of contagion, because, as she puts it, "[c]ommunicable disease knows no borders."[45] Wald finds in Anderson's *Imagined Communities* a bridge between literary and political theory that considers the lived experience of national culture, and notes that "his theory is significant in part for his assertion of the materiality of the imagination and the importance of stories and images in the production of political identity: the replacement of kinship networks by the experience of communion with strangers in a shared political space."[46] In her work, Wald highlights the biological reality that underpins global interconnectivity, one that also crucially depends on coincidences among strangers and that, retroactively, reveals a foundational trope of the nationally imagined community: the discourse of immunity. Routes of contagion become

a way of making visible the routes of global connectivity given that contagion requires both permeability and contact. For this reason, the outbreak narrative "animates the figures and maps the spaces of global modernity. It also accrues contradictions: the obsolescence and tenacity of borders, the attraction and threat of strangers, and especially the destructive and formative power of contagion."[47] Intersecting the local, national, and global scale, contagion charts social interactions that are often not otherwise visible.[48] In a world where capital and information flows are increasingly invisible, and human displacement and movement are hard to track along simple vectors, the patterns of disease emergence, as Wald proposes, highlight the continued necessity and danger of human contact; interdependence is both a peril and an inescapable reality. Wald's reworking of Anderson, by way of the concept of "imagined immunity," is important for the purpose of charting the biopolitical imagining of community, because, as she puts it, communities are connected by more than our imagination since they are linked "by the experience of being human and moving bodily through the same shrinking world."[49]

It goes without saying that Almodóvar's films are not outbreak narratives. But he does borrow, or address, some of these themes in his own imagining of community for this global era. The tropes of organ transplant and life support that underpin the narratives of *The Skin I Live In* and *Talk to Her*, for example, are clearly meant to insist upon an organic/biological interconnectivity among people and strangers. The conjuncture between the interdependence among strangers and the reality of a global pandemic explicitly appears in *All about My Mother*, the first and only of the director's films to directly address AIDS, including the issue of immunity: Esteban, a baby born with the AIDS virus that has killed both his father and mother, miraculously "negativizes" the virus. In other words, the film concludes with a gesture toward immunity. Moreover, baby Esteban's scientifically inexplicable recovery from AIDS is then echoed in Alicia's medically unpredictable status: both cases highlight the mystery that the human body still represents despite the sophisticated medical technology at our disposal. Immunity is not a discourse that is necessarily present in *Talk to Her*, perhaps only through its inverse trope: vulnerability. But a discourse of immunity is central to the imagining of Vera's skin: hers has been genetically manufactured to be resistant to burns and insect bites. Thus, the fantasy that drives the biomedical innovations in the latter film is one we might thus sympathize with: the wish for skin to remain amenable to touch but immune to destruction and violence. Moreover, this wish is resonant in the context of a global geopolitical terrain that is exponentially marked by violence virulently spreading within and across borders.

The shift toward a biologically imagined community that Wald's work proposes ultimately exposes the fragility upon which communal imaginings are founded. At the core of our global interdependence lies the body's ultimate vulnerability, and thus it is not surprising that melodrama participates, or perhaps even makes possible, this mode of imagination. Narratives of epidemiological outbreaks "simultaneously forecast the imminent destruction and affirm the enduring foundations of community."[50] Social organization, in the context of contagion, is thus made visible through the reality of communicable disease and the narrative tropes deployed to make sense of infection. The role of the stranger in Almodóvar's films, which helps drive his coincidence plots, resonates with that of the stranger of epidemiological narratives. The carrier of contagion narratives is the archetypal stranger: an agent of destruction who paradoxically also plays an integral role in affirming the community's bonds. Such strangers make visible the contact people might not know they had—either in the case of an increasingly interdependent world or with each other.[51]

If now, borrowing from Wald's observations about the epidemiological narrative, we return to the scenes of recognition at the end of both *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In*, whereby strangers share unknown (or unacknowledged) intimacies and where those intimate are revealed to have become strangers, then Wald's point about the community-building aspect of epidemiological narratives finds resonance in the films' melodramatic context: "[t]he terror of . . . estrangement marks the deferred recognition of commonalities, the uncanny familiarity, that heralds new social configurations."[52] Yet, in Almodóvar's films, the infectious agent responsible for mapping routes of connectivity, in each of these cases, is not a microbe but the past, forging indissoluble bonds both near and far.

The Body and the Sovereign State: Violence, Absence, Intertextuality

The notion of producing an interdependent community, one where we all shoulder the responsibility of violences perpetrated and justice that needs to be enacted, implicates the viewer of these melodramas in novel ways: we are stripped, precisely, of our role as arbiters of good and evil. As noted earlier, the films are constructed to provoke viewer identification with Benigno and Vera—yet, some time after our spectatorial allegiance is forged, we learn that Benigno has raped Alicia and that Vera, as Vicente, raped Norma. Virtue and villainy are thus not only ambiguously demarcated: they are also occluded from us. Moreover, the mechanism of spectatorial identification itself ensures that the audience is implicated in the oscillation between them. For example, do we find Benigno's death

and Vicente's forced transformation into Vera just punishments? In other words, the films' preoccupation with justice necessitates dispensing with a position from which their viewer can comfortably adjudicate. The violence at the center of *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* thus unsettles the melodramatic structure of virtue/villainy around which the drama of recognition, and thus melodramatic ending, has traditionally revolved. The drama of recognition in melodrama turns upon stories of virtue occluded, persecuted, only to then be revealed and acknowledged by film's end.[53] Almodóvar's films do not uphold such Manichaean resolutions, yet they remain invested in retaining an ethics of recognition that may yet drive democratic ideals and allow for the possibility of imagining community otherwise—outside and across the confines of the nation-state.

It is true that perhaps only Alicia retains a distinct relationship to virtue, but this is complicated by her simultaneously present and absent status. Brooks argues that what distinguishes melodrama from tragedy is that the story does not begin at a point of crisis; rather, its opening moments "suggest mysteries or ambiguities hovering over the world, enigmas unresolved. And there swiftly supervenes a threat to virtue, a situation—and most often a person—to cast its very survival into question, obscure its identity, and elicit the process of its fight for recognition."[54] Here, it is Alicia's consciousness that hovers mysteriously over the on-screen action. Virtue, then, because it is linked to Alicia, consequently takes up the enigmatic quality that remains, to the end, suspended above the film's diegesis. By implicating us in what we miss seeing (the rape and thus the clear threat to virtue), Almodóvar taps into this melodramatic convention, without resolving it. Alicia is the film's sleeping beauty, waiting to be awakened.[55] Virtue is thereby not a condition that the film takes for granted; it is held out as a potentiality rather than a de facto condition.[56]

Moreover, that which is made to mask over the surface of reality, under which we are invited to find meaning, is the surface of film itself. The silent film that is projected in lieu of Benigno's rape both distracts and protects us, the viewer, from having to bear witness to it. "The Shrinking Lover" initially covers over the rape but it also ensures that shock will be transferred onto the audience retroactively, when we come to the belated realization that we missed seeing something that happened right before our eyes. As Kakoudaki notes of this moment, it "traffics in a mode of presentation that both enables and negates knowledge."[57] Nonetheless, the belatedly recognized moment highlights the ethical necessity of remembering traumatic events that may not have been experienced by us directly. This mode of activating prosthetic memory is a requirement for the survival of collective memory.[58] This is especially relevant when one bears in mind that the call for the recovery of historical memory that would, by 2007, be enacted into

law in Spain is part of the sociopolitical backdrop that percolates through these films. And given that the purpose of the law is to identify and, in so doing, "recover" the bodies of those who were murdered and disappeared during the Franco regime, then Alicia's present-absent body accrues a haunting effect well beyond the confines of the screen. Vera's presence and the way it bears the living mark of Vicente's disappearance will take up this concern more directly.

Moreover, "The Shrinking Lover," which mimics the style of German Expressionism, must be read not just as a cinematic and narrative "cover" that, in demanding interpretation of that which it hides, directs us toward the Spanish plight to come to terms with the human rights abuses perpetrated against the political dissidents of Franco's regime, but as a text that also points toward and resurrects a larger history of similar atrocities committed in the twentieth century. This silent film segment of *Talk to Her* has rightly been identified as a moment when the director "pulls off the riskiest scene of his career."[59] Accordingly, these eight minutes of running time have received considerable attention.[60] Yet, though critics have noted the stylistic semblance of the film to 1920s silent cinema and its explicit reference to the American B film *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Jack Arnold, 1957), none has remarked upon the historical backdrop in which these films emerged, which also make up part of the intertext that the director here conjures. *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), a textbook exemplar of German Expressionism, is a parable involving a mad doctor who controls a sleepwalker, a trope that resonates both with *The Skin I Live In* and *Talk to Her*. The film is widely considered to be an allegory for the social undercurrents that would enable the rise of Nazism in Germany and, with it, would unleash the horror of the Holocaust.[61] The allegiances that *Talk to Her* claims to film's silent era are only further emphasized by the way in which the film bookends its story between two Pina Bausch choreographies, which are the other silent texts in this film. The film opens with a piece from *Cafe Müller* (1978) and closes with one from *Masurca Fogo* (1998). Given that Bausch's own roots are in German Expressionist theater, it is clear that *Talk to Her* aims for its inclusion to be more than just a superficial homage to its aesthetics.[62] A further silent cinema intertext is also the inclusion of Geraldine Chaplin, cast to play the dance instructor/choreographer, Katerina. Chaplin is the daughter of Charlie Chaplin, who went into self-imposed exile from the United States in Switzerland after he became a target of McCarthy's 1950s Communist witch hunts. Thus, Chaplin's presence in the web of references points us both toward the expressive registers of silent cinema as well as toward the years of political persecution in the United States during the Cold War, the time period to which *The Incredible Shrinking Man* belongs. The reference

to *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, which showcases a deep anxiety around a man who shrinks out of existence upon being first doused with radioactive dust, speaks to the trauma carried over from the other great holocausts of World War II, the decimation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the subsequent fears of nuclear global destruction that fanned the paranoia of the Cold War. Nothing ushered forward the reality of a "shrinking world" more vehemently, and thus the premise of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* was already a pun that played on the "shrinking" state of the globe and on the equally diminishing scale of the human being, whose vulnerability only increased in the midst of such a geopolitical scenario.[63] At the same time, as Scott Carey (Grant Williams) shrinks in size, his home becomes the only safe space for him, another wry commentary on the United States' increasing insularity during this period. The inscription of these cinematic texts thereby functions, at least in part, to reference the foundations and consequences of mass annihilations. The "covered-over" rape implicates both the audience and film history in a much more complex interplay of violences enacted than what just the single narrative act of Benigno's rape could alone indicate.

These intertextual references that connect *Talk to Her* to specific historical and artistic lineages serve as a counterpoint to the ruptured genealogy that disappeared bodies occasion. Calling forth these references provides a way to etch these disappeared bodies onto a larger transnational history of such abuses, a history built on the echoes produced by absence. In the context of melodrama, the issue of absent/disappeared bodies resonates historically with a foundational moment in the development of modern sovereignty. In Peter Brook's essay "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," where he attempts to account for how and why melodrama found an easy transition between the stage and silent cinema, Brooks lingers over a pivotal revolutionary moment that, in his appraisal, explains melodrama's insistence on bodiliness: the disinterment of the kings of France at the end of the eighteenth century, when their bodies were exhumed and thrown into quicklime.[64] The new regime of virtue, upon which the concept of democracy would rest and to which melodrama speaks, was thus not only instantiated on severing the idea that a divinely ordained power rested on the body of the king, but it was also ensured by the complete elimination of kings' bodies. For Brooks, this moment provides clear evidence for the new valorization of the body that would make it a locus for the inscription of meaning: "[o]ne can hence see in the revolutionary moment the origins of what we might call an aesthetics of embodiment, where the most important meanings have to be inscribed on and with the body."[65] It then follows that theatricality and melodrama became intertwined in their emphasis on a body "seized by meaning."[66] Brooks thus convincingly

explains the almost natural appropriation of melodrama by silent cinema given that the new medium lent itself well to the pantomime-like gestures of theatrical melodrama. The point of his essay, after all, is to argue for the ways in which silent cinema "revives a certain semiotics of the body which first made its appearance in [theatrical] melodrama."[67] Yet, the insistence on pantomime-like gesture and muteness, though important for describing a central aesthetic register of melodrama, also misses the biopolitical implications of Brooks' own argument, one that is worth reviving for the purposes of understanding the roots of melodrama from the context of the twenty-first century and, also, for the objective of comprehending the political implications of the absent/present bodies in the films under analysis in this chapter. Brooks argues that the utter annihilation of kings' bodies subsequently makes possible the appearance of a multiplicity of bodies now endowed with a capacity to bear meaning. But, though he stops at his conclusion that thus begins the story of how the body becomes a substrate for meaning, his analysis unearths an important connection: melodramatic representation is as much founded on the absent body as on a body prone to hyperbolic gesture. I therefore urge that, when we regard the astonishing adaptability of theatrical melodrama to film, we must also consider that the very photographic substrate that gave rise to the cinematic medium, which boasts the uncanny ability to make present that which is absent, is an element that also ought to be taken into account. This is especially true in the context of films that speak to, or emerge from, a history of political disappearances and/or mass annihilations.

As we have seen, the imagining of community depends on how bodies are interconnected in time and space and on how they come into contact with each other, either in actuality or merely as imagined potential. Yet, on a more material level, the political formation of a national community is also determined by the exclusion of certain bodies. The need for this kind of imagining of the body politic arose from the necessity to reconfigure the concept of sovereignty. Like Brooks, Benedict Anderson also points to the same moment that led to the demise of the dynastic realm as an origin point for when the nation begins to be imagined as a political community that is both limited and sovereign. Usurped from the body of the king, sovereignty becomes a disembodied abstraction, now overlaid onto the plane of territory (limited in that it is bounded). The idea that melodrama is founded on the absent body is particularly important if we consider it alongside Giorgio Agamben's contention that a post-World War II incarnation of sovereignty, one that legitimizes a permanent state of exception, is founded on the logic of genocide: bodies that must be disappeared because they are seen to pose a threat to the nation-state, be it because of ideology, ethnicity, or religion.[68] Expanding on Foucault's theorization

of biopower in the context of his own articulations about the formation of modern sovereignty, Agamben claims that "Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life."[69] For Agamben, bare life is a term that refers to a state of being when a body's social legibility is disrupted, divested of its human characteristics by the domain of power and turned into a purely organic existence. And because bare life is the biological substrate upon which social constraints may act, it serves to circumscribe the bounds of citizenry.[70] Both Alicia in her comatose state and Vicente, abducted and turned into matter for experimentation, divested of his rights, represent different incarnations of this formulation. I am not suggesting that Agamben's thesis is the only way to understand the mechanism by which modern sovereignty operates. What I register in the echo between Agamben's formulation and Almodóvar's films is a shared preoccupation with the limits and limitations of sovereignty imagined in legal/juridical terms, which then function to distribute the inclusion and exclusion of certain bodies.

In the case of *The Skin I Live In*, this delimitation (and production) of bodies is particularly clear around the characterization of Dr. Ledgard, who personifies sovereign power. For example, it is clear that in the process of having anointedhimself Vicente's judge, jury, and executioner, Ledgard implements a condition that resonates as a "state of exception." Ledgard operates outside the bounds of justice and medical ethics as well as stands in for various specters of fascism, past and present. Vicente, in effect, is a "disappeared" man who received no trial in the face of his transgression. In fact, it is noteworthy that the film is less interested in resolving the virtue/villainy dichotomy in relationship to Vicente than it is invested in underlining the fact that he is convicted without a trial.[71] This is especially the case because the film opts for ambiguity when it comes to resolving whether Vicente achieved penetration when he raped Norma and whether that alone would exonerate him of rape. For this same reason, the film's audience is also not granted a clear-cut position from which to comfortably judge Vicente's actions, or at least it ensures that if we are inclined to do so, we will be left operating within the same extralegal territory in which Ledgard does. The question surrounding Vicente's abduction thus becomes about whether his captivity, torture, and punishment fit a crime of which he was never convicted in the first place. This theme resonates not only with the ways in which the Historical Memory Law has reignited political divisions in Spain that date back to its civil war, but also with current concerns around the kind of states of indefinite detention that mark a global post-9/11 context, most prominently in the case of the Guantanamo detainees who have not been granted due process and are held outside the bounds of international law. These multiple points of

entry for representing the abuses of sovereign power prove that films like *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* address the present as much as they do the past.

Norma's rape is central to understanding the critique that the film levels against extralegal manifestations of power. It is different than the rape in *Talk to Her* in that not only do we actually witness the rape on screen, but we do so twice (and then we are further subjected to having to be bystanders to Zeca's (Roberto Álamo) rape of Vera as well). Yet, as with the case with *Talk to Her*, the camera also forces us to look away from it—inserting yet another intertext to take our gaze away from it, if even for just a moment. The flashback sequence that establishes the connection between Ledgard and Vera happens during a wedding scene and is introduced by musicians of African descent to the sounds of jazz (this moment foregrounds the kind of musical re-inscriptions that characterize a brand of music that might likely be packaged as "world music," while it also showcases the director's penchant for including musical numbers in his films). This is the single musical number in *The Skin I Live In*, which is further noteworthy because it is helmed by a star guest: Concha Buika. Buika is a performer who herself embodies globalization's multiply hybrid subject: from her personal history (her family is originally from Equatorial Guinea, which immigrated to Majorca, Spain) to her musical influences, which are most often described as a flamenco-jazz hybrid. Buika's performance presides over Norma's rape, which is a rather unlikely moment to place a musical interlude. Mid-rape, the camera cuts away back to the wedding party where Buika calmly addresses an audience that remains offscreen. She dedicates the number that she is about to sing to the bride and groom, to whom the camera does not cut away to, leaving us her only audience. In the meanwhile, we know a rape is in progress. This moment is thus similar to that of "The Shrinking Lover" in *Talk to Her*, except for the fact that we are wholly aware that a rape is taking place simultaneously to the spectacle presented. When we cut back to the scene of the rape, the song, which Buika sings in Spanish, continues to be audible in the background. Then, almost imperceptibly, the song switches registers: suddenly, we are listening to an a capella rendition sung by a young girl in Portuguese. Slowly, the recognition dawns for us that this is the same song that Norma was singing in the garden the day that her mother plunged to her death. Through its aural track, the scene thus layers trauma upon trauma. In this way, it also simulates the whole of the narrative itself, which discloses one family trauma after the next, as if to single out its pervasiveness and thus foil the possibility of ever securely finding its point of origin.

The scene of the rape maps personal trauma onto a broader historical and geopolitical terrain, making the singular resonate with the multiple.[72]

For example, the song that Buika sings was composed for the film's original soundtrack, "En mi piel"/"In My Skin." Given how it parallels the film's own title, the song points toward the centrality of this scene. Its lyrics contain the refrain "the heart of the world sings in my heart" ("*el corazón del mundo canta en mi corazón*"). What, then, does the film propose lies under our collective "skin"? Diegetically, this moment marks the origin point for the horror that Vicente will endure—his fate and Ledgard's, one might say, are wedded from this point onward. But the musical number serves to direct us toward other "origins." It not only points us back toward Norma's witnessing her mother's death, but it takes us back to Brazil, which might remind us of an interesting erasure of nationality and race that the film's inscription of "Brazilian" characters enacts—both Marisa Paredes and Antonio Banderas do not even shed their Spanish accents. The seemingly offhand inclusion of Brazilian characters traces a movement from a postcolonial space to the heart of an ex-colonial power, something that is thrown into relief by Buika's presence, which tracks a different transcontinental circuit of postcoloniality and displacement. In the tones of the gorgeously sung lullaby, Almodóvar imbues this moment with a subtle reminder of the other distant, historical "rapes" that lie at the heart of the so-called hybridity of our globalized landscape with its deep roots in the colonial era.[73]

Furthermore, in Ledgard's case, the link between Spain and Brazil is likely also an oblique nod toward the fact that both countries are leaders in the research of artificial skin. In fact, Spain was the first country to have successfully produced human artificial skin in 2009.[74] These interconnections point toward a particular organization of global capital, one that coalesces around the "life" sciences as a business. Tellingly, Almodóvar understands the extent of the implications of such research on the subject of human identity in racial terms: "the real human skin [is] something by which you identify a person. But of course, more and more, it's not the case. Even in race. Now you can be black and have white skin, or even the opposite."[75] Such an erasure, he seems to suggest, lies at the crux of how deeply our new technologies can disrupt our sense of identity. This multiple imbrication of references from colonialism to biotechnology allows the film to track a genealogical line between how colonial power organized bodies and the new ways in which bodies are distributed within the matrix of global capital. Writing about biopolitics in the context of the war on terror, Achille Mbembe contends that "[a]ny historical account of the rise of modern terror needs to address slavery, which could be considered one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation. In many respects, the very structure of the plantation system and its aftermath manifests the emblematic and paradoxical figure of the state of exception."[76]

Mbembe thus amends Agamben's formulation, which argues that concentration camps are the paradigmatic structure for understanding the modern articulation of the state of exception, to instead propose that "[w]hat one witnesses in World War II is the extension to the 'civilized' peoples of Europe of the methods previously reserved for the 'savages.' "[77] Here, Mbembe refers back to Hannah Arendt's work, which points toward the ways in which National Socialism and imperialism share a constitutive link. As Mbembe reminds us, Agamben's work finds, in the logic and reality of the concentration camp, a shift in the functioning of the state of exception: it is no longer a temporary suspension but a permanent condition. And this, for Mbembe, becomes a constitutive condition for the current arrangement of sovereignty as a permanent "war on terror," sustained in the name of democracy. Yet, the root of this condition must be traced back to slavery because "the colony represents the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of power outside the law (*ab legibus solutus*) and where 'peace' is more likely to take on the face of a 'war without end.' "[78]

As I have outlined, the rapes in *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* each gesture to these roots of modern sovereignty, and thus speak to the ways in which we are fundamentally traversed by its violence. In her analysis of *Talk to Her*, Kakoudaki has argued that Almodóvar "has cruelly implicated screen time with rape."[79] And, if one considers the oblique references to colonialism and World War II that the sequences of the rapes suture, then an even broader picture of the historical and political significance with which these rapes imbue the screen becomes evident, a gesture that binds our complicity by implicating us through our own blindness.

I have argued that, by anchoring themselves in the diegetic presence of bodies marked by absence, these films point to the origins of melodrama as a form predicated as much on the expressiveness of bodies as on their destruction. In other words, by acknowledging the generative capacity of absent bodies, the films investigate the parameters upon which sovereignty stakes its claim. Such a cinematic investigation appears to be most relevant within the context of a crisis in national sovereignty that globalization has generated. If the founding of the sovereign state was structured around not only the symbolic but literal disposal of kings' bodies at the end of the eighteenth century, then the twentieth century, instead, reorganizes sovereign power, in its paradigmatic cases, through effecting the expulsion and/or disappearance of the bodies of would-be citizens. As the bounded nature of nations and the stability of its borders have been challenged, an accompanying sense of the precarious nature of the body has also arisen to accompany this new global transformation. In the context of Spain more specifically, the trope of presence/absence allows for the melodrama in the

films to speak directly to a still tangible history of disappeared bodies that marks the deep political divisions that the pursuit of the Historical Memory Law revived.[80] As I have argued, the medical environments of these two films, where the meticulous care of the body takes place alongside the violence(s) perpetrated upon it, underline the body's vulnerability. The connection that the films forge between the theater (acknowledging the body as the locus of expressivity) and the hospital (gesturing to the body's organic vulnerability) ultimately signals an interest in investigating the biopolitical foundations of the modern body.

2

Costume Changes, Overlapping Histories: *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*

"All memories are traces of tears," thus reads the first intertitle of *2046* (2004), which, as *In the Mood for Love*/*Fa yeung nin wa* (2000) had done before it, uses this throwback gesture to silent cinema to intersperse brief, poetic commentary at a few crucial points in the narrative. Yet, most likely, when one thinks of memory as a trace, one thinks of images, not tears. In the case of film, to speak of the image as trace is a manner of acknowledging that the images that a camera captures are forever a mark of the past. Cinema, in fact, depends on such traces, on those imprints that the world leaves of itself on a celluloid surface, which only later are arranged into narratives. Because of cinema's ability to embalm and resurrect moments past, memory has proven to be an enduring subject for film and film studies, especially in the postwar era. More recently, given the advent of digital media, which allows for images to both travel at great speeds and be amply reproducible, the asynchronous character of memory has become an enduring object of fascination. Digital mediums further boast the capacity to manufacture an image of the world without ever having to come into contact with that world, be it objects, landscapes, or the human form. In this manner, the digital image closely approximates memory's own capacity to embellish and color the traces of a world now past. And thus, though digital capture can still record traces of the world, it has completely transformed our relationship to "photographic" images.

The fact that the advent of the digital could lead to the loss of cinema's indexical relationship with the world has occasioned a rising anxiety around the possibility that historical memory might also be lost,

consequently heralding an epoch of historical amnesia. For this reason, memory has now become a dominant trope in global cinema: the stories films now tell are increasingly structured and driven by mnemonic themes. The experiences that many contemporary films present appear as fragmented and asynchronous, for example. We see this in the advent of films that "play" with time: slow cinema, puzzle films, atemporal films, and films that literally run their narratives in reverse. Yet, as much as we associate memories with images, the mind is not a camera—the pleasure (or terror) of remembering has less to do with fact than with feeling, which always brings experience back to its place in the present, to the sensorial body. The emphasis on memory has thus both led to meditations on the tears (ruptures) in the linear fabric of temporality as well as to an increased focus on sensation: tears of sadness, joy, or anger. Indeed, time is ultimately as intangible as the pain that bears an image, no matter its duration.

Melodrama is the genre of tears—of pathos and emotion. It is also the narrative and dramatic mode that dominates both *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, two films that are exemplary of the turn that contemporary global cinema has taken toward atemporal filmmaking. Yet, despite how amply the films have earned the adjective "melodramatic" to describe them, mostly on account of their lush mise-en-scène and their stories of loss, longing, and unrequited love, little has been developed about them as melodramas. In other words, the atemporal construction of the films, given how they explicitly avoid narrative causality and insist on a retrospective look back in time, has not been an element considered as part of the melodramatic structure that drives these films: as if their temporality were somehow separate from their melodramatic aesthetic. I contend that, rather than elide history, by merely using it as setting/backdrop, the melodrama in the films serves to ground their unhinged time in the historical, producing not ahistorical films but films that instead subscribe to nondominant, a-linear modes of accessing history. Therefore, more than merely presenting us with a lavishly staged, nostalgic look at the past, these films prove to be meditations about how we experience and reconstruct the past in and for the present. Melodrama, in Wong's case, is not employed as a tool to faithfully represent history, even though it is undeniable that his reconstructions of the ambience of the past are painstakingly attentive to detail, but rather as a mode through which to reimagine historiography. In this chapter, I thus propose that we consider how *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* update melodrama's conventions by reflecting upon how one reconstructs history from the vantage point of rupture, discontinuity, echo, and repetition. The films employ melodrama as much for its attention to mise-en-scène as for the ways in which the mode can experientially access conflicting temporalities, overlapping historical frames. I do

not aim to wholly counter the claim that the films are infused by nostalgia, but I want to shift the analytical focus toward investigating how the films themselves self-consciously probe the ways in which cinema recreates history, particularly in the case of historical narratives, which so often employ melodramatic conventions. In other words, my aim is to complicate the notion that the films' nostalgia reconstructs an idealized past, and rather suggest that they ponder the problem of historical reconstruction as such.[1]

A Train Not Yet Arrived

In the Mood for Love and *2046* were produced at a time when Hong Kong found itself suspended between the recent 1997 handover and the looming 2047 expiration date for the agreement that decrees that "the previous capitalist system and way of life shall remain unchanged for 50 years."[2] Change has occurred: Hong Kong has been "reunited" with China after having been ceded to the British as part of the 1842 Treaty of Nanking, which marked the end of the First Opium War. Nothing will change: the conditions of the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984) indicate that, once under Chinese sovereignty, Hong Kong is to be operated under the logic of "one country, two systems." The promise of stasis weighed against the inevitable passing of time, along with the creation of a less-than-perfect union between China and Hong Kong, provides Wong Kar-wai, a filmmaker fixated on the inevitability of change and the impermanence of relationships, with an attractive paradox to probe. These temporal and spatial contradictions (that things will or will not change, that the unification of territories is an actual possibility) lie at the heart of the stories of unrequited and lost love that both *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* tell.[3]

Read through this lens, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* are melodramas about the condition of living in time. Taken together, the films span the time period between 1962 and 1970.[4] The evident nostalgia in the films has been attributed to the fact that the time period that the films bracket, and which they painstakingly reconstruct, coincide with the years when Wong himself arrived as a child to Hong Kong from Shanghai—part of an exodus of mainland Chinese that began after Mao's assumption to power in 1949. Perhaps not coincidentally, the start date for *In the Mood for Love*, 1962, is the same year that Wong arrived in Hong Kong, along with his family. In fact, the spaces the films depict are where transients temporarily settled in Hong Kong before departing for other shores. Many in Hong Kong emigrated between 1984, the date when the handover agreement was first reached, and 1997. Wong thus seems to tap into a sense a transience that feels already like a historical repetition. If Wong's pre-1997 films were

characterized by the trope of expiration, evinced by the constant presence of clocks counting down time, his post-1997 films instead ponder temporal suspension: they linger somewhere between past, present, and future. *In the Mood for Love*, for example, prominently foregrounds enormous clocks in its mise-en-scène, but unlike the clocks in his previous films, these do not tell time in any way that helps make sense of the film's temporal structure: much more helpful in this regard are the actresses' changes of costume or, in the case of *2046*, Bai Ling's (Zhang Ziyi) accumulation of money, which she stores in a box under her bed (a cue for the viewer that she has had many more encounters with Mr. Chow than those we see represented, where a $10 bill is exchanged per tryst).[5] The films thus present us with a kind of no-time: a temporality constructed from echoes and repetitions.[6] Moreover, the reality of Hong Kong as waiting at a threshold is also rendered aesthetically. For example, *2046* repeats extreme close-up shots of Mr. Chow gazing toward an unknown space at the edge of the frame. We know that he has rented a room, number 2047, and peeps through one of its room dividers into what we presume to be room 2046.

With the July 1, 1997, date looming, Wong's *Happy Together*/*Chun gwong cha sit* (1997) had already touched upon the theme of temporal and spatial exile. The film begins when two male lovers take a vacation that quickly mutates into a state of self-imposed exile in Buenos Aires, which then becomes the setting for their breakup. Stuck on the other side of the world, Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) and Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung) begin a cycle of separation and reunification, propelled by Po-wing's charming, though sadomasochistic, credo of "let's start over," an ethos that ironically echoes the relationship between Hong Kong and China. Reverberations of the conundrum of having a "borrowed place" like Hong Kong return to its "origin" also resonate in Po-wing's mantra.[7] The code of borrowing time, spoken in financial terms (retail vs. wholesale), will also come up as the defining element of Mr. Chow's and Bai Ling's relationship in *2046*. Jean Ma, in her work on *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, notes how the films acquire a deeper historical meaning once their notions of change, stasis, and deferral are recognized to overlap with Hong Kong's long-standing status as a colonial territory on "loan" to Britain:

> Its watchword, "a borrowed place, on borrowed time," conveys at once the uniquely conditional political state in which Hong Kong has subsisted for much of the twentieth century and its entrenched identity as a trading port and a site of passage attracting a floating population of migrants, refugees, and expatriates. A place defined by the constant movement of people and things, by an urban culture of dislocation and speed, Hong Kong elicits a heightened sense of the ephemerality of the present, of "a reality that is always outpacing our awareness of it."[8]

But ultimately, rather than read the films as works about the present, Ma reads both *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* as sentimental works that long for the return of the past.[9] Instead, I argue that the films are a present-time meditation on the contradictions imposed by the knowledge that time changes everything, that nothing changes, and that Hong Kong will change again when the "one country, two systems" agreement expires in 2047.

At the end of *Happy Together*, Lai returns to Hong Kong alone, having left Po-wing stranded in Argentina without a passport—an incident that acknowledges the crisis in citizenship/identity that would befall Hong Kongers in the years leading up to the handover. The last time we see Lai, he is on a train, having just arrived in Hong Kong. The camera, confined inside the train along with him, captures time-sped images of the cityscape passing by. Yiu-fai never steps off the train before the soundtrack erupts into The Turtles' 1967 "Happy Together." Thus, Yiu-fai never arrives. The theme of exile and the train provide the most obvious connection between *2046* and *Happy Together*. The voice-over that accompanies the opening futuristic images of *2046* tells us, "In the year 2046, every railway network spreads the globe. A mysterious train leaves for 2046 every once in a while. Every passenger who goes to 2046 has the same intention, they want to recapture lost memories, because nothing changes in 2046." Finally, the theme of non-arrival is also echoed in the film's final intertitle: "He didn't turn back. It was as if he'd boarded a very long train heading for a drowsy future through the unfathomable night." As if condemned to remain suspended above the city, and a stable place in history, from the train in *Happy Together* to the train in *2046*, Wong Kar-wai's characters remain in a kind of spatiotemporal exile, never again stepping foot in present-day Hong Kong. Wong returns to the 1960s after the 1997 handover as a way to simultaneously evade and reflect upon Hong Kong's return to China. Acclaimed for his realistic portrayal of Hong Kong's urban dwellers in films like *Chungking Express (Chung Hing sam lam)* (1994) and *Fallen Angels (Do lok tin si)* (1995), Wong has noticeably not had any of his characters walk Hong Kong's post-1997 streets since its return to China. In fact, *2046* promised to seal the cycle begun with *Happy Together* and followed by *In the Mood for Love* into a trilogy of present, past, and future.[10] Yet, despite offering some fictive futuristic moments (its main character writes sci-fi-inspired novels), *2046*, like *In the Mood for Love*, remains grounded in the 1960s. Wong Kar-wai, the filmmaker, seems to not have quite returned from his self-imposed exile to Buenos Aires during the months leading up to the handover.

In the Mood for Love and *2046*, parts of which were shot simultaneously, offer an operatic rendering of disjunctive temporalities, filtered through the experience of its protagonist, Chow Mo-wan (Tony Leung), who is and is not the same Mr. Chow in each movie—only one of the many instances

that underscore the films' reliance on repetition and substitution.[11] Wong Kar-wai's *2046* is split between three times: the narrative present of 1960s Hong Kong, the fictional future of 2046, and the unknown temporal location of the protagonist's voice-over, suspended over the filmed narrative. *In the Mood for Love*, instead, is wholly set in the 1960s: most of the film elapses between 1962 and 1963. By the end of *In the Mood for Love*, having failed to convince Mrs. Chan (Maggie Cheung) to leave along with him, Mr. Chow departs for Singapore: it is 1963.[12] Then, in somewhat jarring fashion, the film concludes with an elliptical jump to Cambodia. It is now 1966: we observe Chow enter the frame and lean over a circular hole carved into one of the stone surfaces of the Angkor Wat ruins, into which he whispers an inaudible secret. *2046* continues roughly where *In the Mood for Love* leaves off. The film begins with a sequence in which the hole at the ruins of Angkor Wat has been updated for an enormous glass-like eye/hole—a futuristic version of the secret-engulfing cavity. The present-day action in *2046* then picks up in 1966, when Mr. Chow relates in voice-over that he has now returned from Singapore to Hong Kong. The image of the whispering hole that ends one film and begins the other acknowledges both the temporal gap that separates each film and calls out one of the films' shared themes: memories have been lost into the void of time. And, in fact, this motif of a secret being deposited into an eternal void is one to which *2046* returns to with some obsession.

In the Mood for Love tells a simple story: a man and a woman rent rooms in adjacent apartments and move in with their respective spouses. Chow Mo-wan and Su Li-zhen/Mrs. Chan brush past each other in hallways and narrow passageways while they are both forced to spend time alone given the work demands on their busy spouses. Yet, as it turns out, their respective spouses are having an affair with each other. When the pair discovers the affair, they begin to playact, attempting to reenact the events that led their spouses to fall for each other. Mimicry gives way to reality, and, in the end, Mr. Chow and Mrs. Chan fall in love. Yet their pride and sense of propriety does not permit their own love affair to flourish: they stifle their burgeoning feelings and, in doing so, they miss their chance at romance. In proper melodramatic fashion, they remain caught somewhere between their desire for each other and their social circumstances, bound as they are by social stricture and their wish to retain moral superiority over their cheating counterparts.

The plot of *2046* is also rather simple: Mr. Chow rents a room (number 2047) in a hotel in Hong Kong and cycles through a series of affairs with various women who cross his path. When he is not keeping their company, he is writing pulp fiction stories in his room—the science fiction narrative that the film begins with, "2046," is one of them (before the film concludes,

Chow changes its title to "2047"). As his new womanizing ways indicate, *2046*'s protagonist is no longer quite the same shy and lovelorn Mr. Chow that we knew from *In the Mood for Love*. So it goes in a Wong Kar-wai film: time changes everything. Throughout *2046*, Chow goes about his life committed to remain uncommitted, perhaps hoping to align himself with the imaginary, unbound time of the future. Nothing takes him away from his self-imposed emotional exile, not even the phenomenal sequence of women that zigzag in and out of his life: characters played by Gong Li, Carina Lau, Zhang Ziyi, and Faye Wong. Seen from the vantage point of *2046*, *In the Mood for Love* tells the story of the love affair that has forever scarred Mr. Chow. In fact, at a couple of points during *2046*, Chow's voice-over narration intimates that the loss that structures his encounters with women in *2046* is that of Maggie Cheung's Su Li-zhen from *In the Mood for Love*. Maggie Cheung is indeed absent from *2046*, though we do have cinematic echoes of her: she makes three enigmatic appearances, disjoined from the already-fragmented narrative, moments held on screen so briefly that they easily go unnoticed.[13] In this respect, they haunt the viewer as much as they do Mr. Chow.

True to melodrama's emphasis on gesture and mise-en-scéne, *In the Mood for Love* places the weight of signification on objects and gestures that bear proof of an event that has occurred in the past: the love affair between Mr. Chow's and Mrs. Chan's respective spouses. Neckties and handbags, coincidences and mistimings provide clues that reveal the affair.[14] In their aim to understand what might have brought the cheating pair together, Mr. Chow and Mrs. Chan taste their counterparts' favorite foods and perfect their charming banter. As the film proceeds, Mrs. Chan role-plays her imagined confrontation with her husband, and Mr. Chow, who has actually fallen in love with Mrs. Chan, practices their final separation. Revealing that the film's interest is as much on the process of historical reconstruction as it is on reconstructing the mood and setting of the 1960s, the principal characters connect by attempting to understand an event that, like history, has already happened offscreen. As with Maggie Cheung's Su Li-zhen's absence from *2046*, here, too, *In the Mood for Love* is held together by an event that has occurred outside of its diegesis. The rehearsal scenes act as set pieces that underline the artificiality of turning the past into a sense-making narrative. Moreover, they also acknowledge how the very act of narrating and representing the past creates the present. For example, when Mr. Chow reveals to Mrs. Chan that in the process of playacting he has actually fallen for her, he explains, "feelings creep up just like that." Hong Kong's 1997 handover back to China after 99 years of British colonial control of the territory is likewise an event that also occurs outside the diegesis of the films and yet inescapably informs them.

Mr. Chow's predicament is not uncommon in a Wong Kar-Wai film. Strangers who pass by each other in a narrow hallway "by chance," only to become friends or lovers, is a staple narrative device in Wong's films. Moreover, if love is in the cards, the love affairs are fated to fail (except, it seems, for Faye Wong's characters) because one of the parties either feels differently or is already in love with another, a consequence that imbues his stories with a pervasive sense of loss. But rather than to take this as indicative of Wong's pessimistic view of romance, we should consider how Wong's love stories are yet another way that the director deploys metaphors about the experience of time. The instance of two people meeting marks the beginning of the relationship's inevitable end; it becomes a manner through which Wong's lovers enter into an experience of temporality. Love is the vehicle through which his investigation of historical change gets grafted onto stories of love found and lost. The romantic stories are metaphors for the experience of time, making temporality an organic, felt experience. "Love is a matter of timing" may be a melodramatic cliché, but it is also an edict that Wong's characters are prone to repeat and an ethos that his narratives take seriously. Thus, far from being merely a story overlaid upon a history that it does not in any way animate, the romance that structures the films is an essential component to the films' organizing of temporality.

Indeed, Wong's films have invited much discussion about the nature of time as structured and enacted in them, particularly in the case of *2046*. The films lend themselves to this kind of analysis because of their complex imbrication of past, present, and future temporalities as well as for the way in which these are represented through the tropes of chance, change, coincidence, destiny, fate, eternity, repetition, echo, and déjà vu. In fact, it is hard to think of any variation in the representation of temporality that the films leave out, which makes it difficult for any approach to the films to encompass all these different modalities in its analysis. Writing about the atemporality of *2046*, Todd McGowan argues that the key operation that the film accomplishes is to turn a temporal category (the year 2046) into a spatial one (the place 2046). In this view, temporality, especially a time of the future that is virtual and inaccessible, becomes an alternate space, one that thus becomes potentially accessible.[15] Though McGowan's insightful analysis is useful for understanding the aesthetic and temporal mechanisms that indeed make *2046* an atemporal film, it does not pay sufficiently close attention to the film's structuring of its specific social, political, and cultural contexts. By contrast, Jean Ma's dissection of the atemporal structure of the films does explicitly find echoes, as noted above, with Hong Kong's historical reality. In fact, if the temporal finds spatial terms in Wong Karwai's films, as McGowan argues, it has centrally to do with the fact that

Hong Kong itself is and has been, as Ma notes, almost ontologically speaking, a territory suspended between powers, passed around in time. Yet, Ma herself locates the temporal structure of the films not so much in their conversation with history per se but rather in relation to conventional narrative structure, thus giving rise to "disorderly formations of time that are splintered, heterogeneous, nonlinear."[16]

If, instead, we look at the films through the lens of melodrama, we can more effectively appreciate the affective encounter that takes place across temporal frames (past and present), while also acknowledging how the films play with the sense of time's irreversibility.[17] As Marcia Landy has argued of melodrama's investment in history:

> Melodrama is obsessed with history, but its representations of time and space are, in Gramsci's terms, neither unified nor realistic; rather, they are "crude" and elliptical, a veritable repository of forms of knowledge that are contradictory and excessive. In relation to the excess it embodies, melodrama reveals that the emotions and behaviors it belabors are not excrescenses but are intrinsically the carriers of value in relation to social phenomena.[18]

Melodrama is a template that can serve to understand the complex and hybrid histories that are produced in response to a global landscape, which has been merely overlaid onto a postcolonial one.[19] This kind of geographical displacement is acknowledged in the opening sequences of *Happy Together*: the two Chinese men take a trip to Argentina to find the Iguazú Falls because they own a lamp with the Iguazú Falls depicted on it. The lamp is a tourist-like memento that sits right next to a container of soda water, "waikiki"—such is the way that commodities circulate in a global marketplace.[20] The era of cosmopolitanism, which *Happy Together* marks by including the sign of the "Cosmos Hotel" in its image track, has overlaid itself upon that of Orientalism, marked in *2046* by the presence of the "Orient Hotel" (no other hotel signs are foregrounded in either film). Furthermore, Wong employs Buenos Aires, like Hong Kong also a port city, as a cinematic echo; the spaces of the immigrant neighborhood of La Boca are shot much like the transient spaces in Wong's Hong Kong films. Buenos Aires also happens to be at the other end of the world: it represents the farthest place on earth to which the lovers could have gone to get away from Hong Kong's looming deadline. In short, these films ultimately demonstrate how current films that structure their narratives achronologically are in fact acknowledging that history itself cannot any longer be narrated linearly. If melodrama continues to be an effective mode to best express this knowledge, it is because it is the narrative medium (along with horror) that is most clearly invested in telling stories of a repressed past that nonetheless finds a way to act itself out in the present.

Shards of Actuality

Though the temporal construction of Wong's films has received considerable attention, the same is not true of how his films meditate on the construction of history as such. As we have seen, Wong's films present us with echoes of Hong Kong's colonial history that reverberate as echoes across time. By calling attention to the staged nature of the action he depicts, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* explicitly take up the question of how history is accessed and represented in fiction film: it is always already a reconstruction, always already at a remove from actual historical events.

From the settings to the costumes, the films' mise-en-scéne provides the most obvious cue that the films are set in the past. But, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* also contain a fragment of a televised, actual news event that serves to place the films within a politico-historical context. *In the Mood for Love* includes footage of the arrival of Charles de Gaulle in Cambodia, and *2046* shows televised images from the 1966 Hong Kong riots. Referring to these snippets of documentary footage, Ma notes how they jar against the otherwise dreamy atmosphere of the films. She argues that the newsreel footage functions as a dual placeholder: it establishes the historical setting and the point of connection between both films (1966).[21] Yet, the footage is more than just a placeholder that locates the fictional world of the films within a historical frame. In both *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, the footage appears without warning; there is no diegetic character watching a television screen, and thus no point of view that mediates our encounter with this footage. In this regard, the event has a life of its own, unhinged as it is from the narrative flow, as if a repressed historical register were demanding to burst onto the surface track of the film. The disruption effected by the grainy televised images calls out the fictional nature of the polished images of the films. These eruptions of actual rather than reconstructed memory destabilize the films' reliance on the personal and private realm of romance, drawing our attention to the political context that pulsates just below the constructed surface of the films. In melodramatic terms, we can say that these televised fragments function as the films' excessive register, which works to resurrect the repressed past.

Happy Together sets the stage for the appearance of this trope in the two films that followed it, another reason why the three films can be regarded as working in conjunction. As we have seen, *Happy Together* is the film that most forcefully introduces the question of history and its repetition, the subject that Wong's subsequent two films centrally take up. *Happy Together* is also the first of the three films to contain the trope of a secret whispered into the void to be lost forever. The recurrence of this motif in *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* points to how the films reflect not only on the subject

of how we remember history but also questions what traces history has left for us to remember.

In *Happy Together*, the insertion of the televised news broadcast occurs at a moment when Yiu-fai has definitively separated from Po-wing. After their repeating cycle of breaking up and coming together again, Yiu-fai leaves Argentina and makes a stopover in Taiwan while en route to Hong Kong. Taiwan, like Hong Kong, bears a contested relationship to China, though Taiwan's specific conditions are also different. While sitting in his hotel room, Yiu-fai watches the news on television announcing Deng Xiaoping's death on February 19, 1997 (he is listening to the news the morning of February 20th). Deng is the political leader credited for China's turn toward embracing a market economy. He was also a key player in the negotiations with Britain that led to the Sino-British Joint Declaration in 1984, which established the terms of Hong Kong's return to China. The coincidence that Yiu-fai arrives in Taiwan on the date of Deng's death is, melodramatically speaking, hardly a coincidence, since, given that it is such an overdetermined moment that also marks the finality of the couple's breakup, one cannot ignore the cue to read its allegorical significance.

In the case of *In the Mood for Love*, the irruption of the televised footage of President de Gaulle's visit to Cambodia in 1966 occurs during the film's closing moments. This moment suggests a link between history and mistiming given that the shift from the melancholy register of the film's fictional drama to the grainy images of a factual event has immediately followed the instance in the film when the would-be lovers miss their last chance at having met each other again in the same confines of the hallway that had initially, by coincidence, brought them together. Years after she has parted ways with Chow, Su Li-zhen has moved back into the same apartment building, now with her young son. On this particular day, Mr. Chow has come to pay a visit and deliver a gift to his former landlords. For a moment that lingers almost frozen on screen, he stares at the doorbell to her apartment, but does not ring it. In the shot that follows, we are made privy to Mrs. Chan preparing to exit her apartment, but once she does so, she no longer finds Mr. Chow. The two final images that encapsulate their having now missed each other in time and space (he staring at the buzzer; she preparing to head out of her apartment) are separated by an intertitle that states: "That era has passed. Nothing that belonged to it exists anymore." At that point, the film cuts away to the televised footage of a historically significant meeting where we see de Gaulle arriving at Pochentong airport, greeted by Prince Norodom Sihanouk and Queen Sisowath Kossamak, to then take the ten-kilometer drive to Phnom Penh. The news footage voice-over tells us that the 200,000 people lining up along the route was an "unprecedented welcome in the history of the kingdom."

Wong leaves out from the diegesis any part of the speech that de Gaulle was there to deliver, in which he denounced US involvement in Vietnam and urged for its withdrawal (France had already withdrawn from the US-led NATO that same year). The juxtaposition of the fictional and documentary scenes reveal that, for Wong, mistiming is not only at the heart of love, but also at the heart of history. After this brief insertion of documentary footage, the film then cuts to the closing scenes of Mr. Chow at the ruins of Angkor Wat, whispering his secret into a hole carved into the stone of one of the temple ruins.

The connection between the news footage and the whispering hole is a key that we must then employ in order to understand the reappearance of both of these tropes, which find deeper expression and their conclusion (if we think of the films as a trilogy) in *2046*. Rather than insert its television footage toward the end of the film, as the previous two films do, *2046* employs it as its entry point into 1966. It occurs just after Chow has parted ways with the Black Spider (Gong Li) whose name is Su Li-zhen. After his stint in Singapore, Chow has decided to return to Hong Kong and has asked her to go away with him; like the Su Li-zhen before her, she has also turned down his invitation. In voice-over, Mr. Chow tells us, "as I recall, this was the last time I saw her."[22] At that point, a slow-motion close-up of her black-gloved hand swinging, like the pendulum of a metronome, alongside her as she walks (and also calling forth echoes of Maggie Cheung's Su Li-zhen's walks down to the noodle shop in *In the Mood for Love*) transitions us to the futuristic train and computerized images of 2046 (the place). Then, as if the train of the future had actually transported us back in time, the next scene introduces the black-and-white television images reporting on Hong Kong's 1966 riots. These images literally function as a media portal that carries us to the fictional present-day action of the film. In other words, the virtual time-traveling train depicted in *2046*'s computerized sequences gives way to televised footage that actually does time travel (in the sense that it remains a record of the past that can be accessed through audiovisual archives in the present).

Thus, as Jean Ma contends, it is indeed true that the televised footage serves the narrative purpose of providing the films' viewers with a sense of each particular film's historical backdrop. But, the irruption of televised events is one way in which the films also comment on the role that the media and mediated events play in preserving cultural memory. As Jacqui Sadashige notes in her review of *In the Mood for Love*, Wong's films are posing deeper questions about the nature of historical change, juxtaposing private memory and public record, and thus insisting on the interrelationship between the incidental and the monumental.[23] And though, on the one hand, the films' attention to intimate spaces and interpersonal

dynamics definitely suggest that "the monumental traces that often pass for history cannot compare to the substance and the sentiment that are forgotten,"[24] on the other hand, the mistimings that characterize the lovers' encounters turn out to be a commentary on the dynamics of history itself. The fragments of documentary TV footage thus insist upon the fact that the "memory" of historical events is always, already mediated.

The televised footage alongside the attention to the period's fashion and style do indeed unequivocally mark the films as stories that are set in the past. Yet, each film nonetheless breaks with the conventions of historical fiction, including upturning the role that romance plays in buoying such narratives. After all, intertitles in both films keep reminding the viewer that the past is fundamentally inaccessible. Moreover, the graininess of the televised images also acknowledges their deterioration, pointing to the slow fade-out of mediated historical memory. As Ackbar Abbas has argued of Hong Kong, it has become the space of the *déjà disparu*, a place where historical referents are rapidly disappearing.[25] In a manner that resonates with this vein of thought, *In the Mood for Love*, Wong has explained, was slated to start in a hotel room (and the shooting of the film began there). In fact, Wong chose to transform an old hospital for British soldiers, which was left vacant after the 1997 handover, into the film's setting for his characters' rendezvous. The reason for doing so was because it resembled buildings of the 1950s and because, given that it was slated for demolition, he wanted to preserve it on film.[26] Therefore, the televised fragments are part of the narrative and aesthetic choices through which the films meditate on evanescence and preservation.

These televised snippets also help Wong Kar-wai draw a map that interconnects different time periods and locales, tracing a complicated postcolonial map that simultaneously points toward a history of British and French colonial rule in the region, which was soon to give way to American imperialism in the postwar era. Thus, the choice to begin his spatiotemporal trilogy of exile in Argentina (with *Happy Together*) should also be linked to the fact that Hong Kong is not only a port city, but also a contested territory. The opening shot of *Happy Together* in fact captures two British National (Overseas) passports being stamped for entry into Argentina (the BN(O) nationality was created after the 1984 agreement and can be acquired only by those born in Hong Kong prior to June 30, 1997). Toward the end of the film, a character, Chang (Chang Chen), whom Yiu-fai had befriended, travels to what he calls "the end of the world" where he intends to deposit Yiu-fai's sadness. Chang carries said sadness in what is, in essence, a precursor of the secret engulfing hole: a tape-recording machine into which Yiu-fai has secretly whispered the source of his sadness. Chang is Taiwanese, a detail that is hardly a coincidence

at this point in the film when we are reminded of the overlapping histories of contested territories, signaling toward yet more distant remnants of the colonial era. The place where Chang goes to deposit Yiu-fai's secret is the Les Éclaireurs Lighthouse—a name meaning "the Enlighteners," and a remnant from an early period of French colonial presence.[27] "The end of the world," instead, is a nickname used to refer to Ushuaia, the southernmost city in the world, founded by British missionaries in the mid-1800s, which, not coincidentally, is very proximate (400 miles) from the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, a territory long disputed between Britain and Argentina. The choice of Argentina as a setting, then, goes beyond just generating an echo of Hong Kong as port city. Indeed, the imaginary cartography that Wong traces makes reference to each of their idiosyncratic colonial relationships to Britain.

By referring to President de Gaulle's 1966 visit to Cambodia, *In the Mood for Love* highlights the import of the long-standing colonial presence of France in the region that was once known as French Indochina. As noted earlier, de Gaulle's visit, which culminated in a speech at Phnom Penh on September 1, 1996, openly denounced US intervention in Vietnam, and urged for the withdrawal of US troops from the region.[28] With the apparent demise of colonialism looming, this was a time when old and new global powers jockeyed for position on the world stage: the waning of one power left room for the emergence of another. Having chosen this specific segment of documentary footage, which charts the beginning of a decisive geopolitical transition, once again allows Wong to awaken the memory a past, historical "handover." The mediated memories of these transitional events are, then, presented as historical déjà vu.[29]

The year 1966, which connects *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*, also marks the start of the Cultural Revolution in China. The 1966 riots on which *2046* focuses were staged to protest British colonial rule, as dissatisfaction in Hong Kong was reaching a boiling point. But, a year later, another set of riots would erupt; these became larger in scope as they escalated from labor strikes to violent demonstrations and eventually terrorist attacks. These second set of riots were fueled by pro-communist infiltrators and were inspired by the Cultural Revolution.[30] Sino-British tensions grew during this time; at one juncture, the British embassy was burned down in Beijing.[31] As Robert Bickers and Ray Yep note, there has been a decades-long silence about this episode in Hong Kong, Chinese, and British imperial history.[32] Thus using the same terms his films set up, Wong unearths historical secrets that have been kept in the hole of time.

In the Mood for Love and *2046* recognize, and also seem to warn, that the evanescence of historical memory sets the stage for events in history

to repeat. In so doing, they ponder film's relationship to the construction and dissemination of such memory and they challenge monolithic versions of history and its representation. In one of its intertitles, *In the Mood for Love* tells us, "he remembers those vanished years, as though looking through a dusty window-pane; the past is something he could see but not touch. And everything he sees is blurred and indistinct." Such observations, as expressed in the intertitles that intersperse both films, understand the past to accumulate in fragments, while direct contact with it remains foreclosed.

As I have demonstrated, the televised images do a lot more than merely situate the films within a singular point in time in a historical continuum. Instead, they serve as keys that open up a sprawling kaleidoscope of historical references that move back and forth across different eras and regions, simultaneously connecting various points in time. A characteristic of our globalized world is that we rely increasingly on electronic evidence (cinema, television, video) for our understanding of historical events. As Frank P. Tomasulo notes, "our concepts of historical referentiality (what happened), epistemology (how we know what happened), and historical memory (how we interpret it and what it means to us) are now determined primarily by media imagery."[33] In other words, our belief in the reality of events is in direct relationship to our reliance on media imagery: "cameras are everywhere and the whole world *is* watching."[34] The insertion of the pixelated news footage into the fictional films' diegesis serves to underscore the way that recording media is able to "can" images that do not expire (cans and expiration dates were already a subject of Wong's *Chungking Express*), which calls attention to the inextricable relationship that media has in generating and retaining "prosthetic" cultural memory.[35] Moreover, the fragments of televised footage foreground the question of the event as a fundamental building block of history, in this case one that also questions its mode of capture and transmission. In this respect, Wong's choice of presenting the historical events via televised footage make his films resonate with what Hayden White has called "the modernist event."[36] For White, the modernist event is endowed with spectral qualities, in the sense that it is not a temporally stable event. The event can bleed from the past into the present, such that the possible meanings of present and past events are collapsed into each other, fused.[37] For this reason, "[a]nti-narrative techniques, characterized by fragmentation, the exploding of the conventions of the traditional tale, and the dissociation or splitting of narrative functions, may be the most appropriate techniques for representing the historical reality of the contemporary period, with its unprecedented catastrophes and its compounded global contexts."[38]

Quizás, quizás, quizás: The Fabric of History

If the televised snippets in *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* serve to interconnect the films as stories that intersect in 1966, the "whispering holes" that each film turns to provide another point of intersection. The ending of *In the Mood for Love*, where secrets are whispered into the hole carved into an ancient temple, is updated in *2046* to a futuristic version. The ending of *In the Mood for Love* at the ruins of Angkor Wat, Cambodia's ancient capital, which lay on a pilgrim route between China and India, serves to further align the film with an ageless history of movement, exile, and dislocation. But this gesture again inscribes history's propensity for repetition: the mournful tone that dominates the sequence at Angkor Wat ultimately presages the violent events that are about to unfold (most prominently: the escalation of the Vietnam War and the Cambodian genocide at the hands of the Khmer Rouge). Angkor Wat, Cambodia's capital city before it was moved to Phnom Penh, was itself once the stage of a massacre of Buddhist monks (and note the young monk who is the only witness to Mr. Chow's spilling of his secret into the bottomless hole of time).

This final scene in the film first introduces, in close-up, the hole in one of Angkor Wat's stone surfaces (figure 2.1). Chow walks into the frame and leans toward the wall, his mouth murmuring inaudibly into the crevice as the camera glides around him. The film's sad, haunting theme song fills the otherwise silent space around him. The final act of a film built on lingering,

Figure 2.1 *In the Mood for Love*, whispering hole

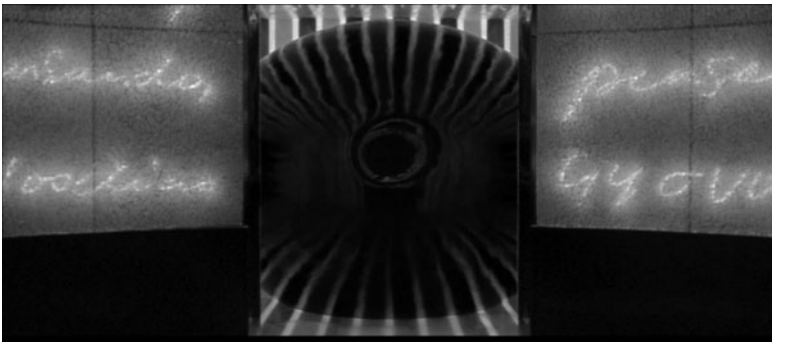

Figure 2.2 *2046*, whispering hole and blue screen

lavishly layered images, and an equally enchanting soundtrack, then has Mr. Chow walk briefly through one of the temple's hallways, only to exit, in shadow, both the frame and what remains of the narrative through a doorway. We are left to linger through emptiness and the sensation of loss and to recognize the ways in which the film's passageways have orchestrated moments that were destined to be lost.

As I have noted, the year 1966 and the visual trope of the secret-swallowing hole are the point of contact joining the end of *In the Mood for Love* to the beginning of *2046*. Two blank blue screens that flank the glass-like hole of *2046* add to its futuristic veneer. The blankness of the blue screens suggests that among that which has been lost to time is the transmission of images from the past (figure 2.2). The blue screens, furthermore, also simulate those that digital technology employs to create image tracks that may have no base in reality. Instead of images, the two huge television screens on either side of the mechanical whispering hole contain words that appear and disappear. The faint words that appear on the blue screens that open *2046* are, at least in part, the lyrics to the song that punctuates the moment at the end of *In the Mood for Love* when Chow almost rings Mrs. Chan's doorbell and then does not: Nat King Cole's Spanish-language rendition of a famous bolero, "Quizás, quizás, quizás," which translates as "Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps," points toward a condition of open possibility—precisely that element which is negated by the backward glance toward history, which usurps events from the realm of chance. The words are scribbled in cursive across the electronic-blue walls. The conjuring of "*quizás*" resonates with the penultimate intertitle in *2046*: "When the peony blooms she stands tall and then goes away. Does she mean 'no' or 'yes'?" This emphasis on ambivalence also suggests that, despite the film's carefully constructed universe, there is the recognition of

the open possibility that chance embodies, and thus an acknowledgment that only our look back fixes events in time.

In this respect, it is not coincidental that the future in *2046* is solely rendered in computer-generated imagery (CGI). As Karl Schoonover has noted,

> [w]ith digital technology's promise of invisible manipulation, the cinematic image will soon be infinitely perfectible, thus making the accidental and unexpected all the more interesting. In other words, cinema studies' present anticipates a moment in the near future when contingency's force will have been completely obliterated from the image.[39]

Through the inclusion of the blue screens, *2046* directly meditates on this possibility. Yet, Wong, the filmmaker, also seems to want to counter this inevitability by inscribing imperfection in his CGI images. To do so, he avails himself of an extradiegetic "chance" occurrence. The film's CGI images were not finished on time for the film's premiere at the Cannes film festival, and Wong was forced to go with the available line test. Later, when the images were wholly completed, Wong insisted on overlapping the look of the line test. This overlap between the finished digitization of the futuristic city and Wong's insistence on retaining its blueprint, so to speak, is a reason that the futuristic images of *2046* look unfinished; they actually retain a patina of their computerization.[40] Wong opts to have the imperfection of the images call attention to their status as computer images, as if to foil the perfection that they might otherwise deliver. Thus, despite having had both the technology and funding at his disposal, Wong notably opts to allow the images to betray the history of their production. In fact, he also holds onto an element of imperfection when it comes to the androids that work on the train that travels from 2046: we learn that something in their mechanism gets worn down, and, for this reason, their reactions to stimuli occur at a time lag. These gestures encapsulate Wong's resistance to wholly accept the perfection of the cybernetic universe.

Instead, throughout both films, Wong belabors to retain a relationship to chance and coincidence. Coincidence is always a chance event, yet, when employed in storytelling, it paradoxically also fixates the chance encounter. Melodrama is the natural substrate through which to probe these obsessions because of its propensity to read meaning into the would-be "coincidental" events it depicts. The moment when Chow pauses in front of Mrs. Chan's door at the end of *In the Mood for Love* and the soundtrack reiterates its "perhaps, perhaps, perhaps" is one example of how the film acknowledges this contradiction. Chow and Mrs. Chan had already met by chance, when they moved into their adjacent apartments at

the same time, and, by the end of the film we learn that, by chance, they also happen to have just missed ever meeting again. In *2046*, this particular aspect of melodrama's world view is embodied by the Black Spider: she invites Chow on two occasions to a random drawing of cards. The idea is that if she wins she stays, but if he wins she will return with him to Hong Kong. Of course, leaving nothing to chance, she only ever draws the Ace of Spades (once at the beginning of the film, a second time at the end). She is a professional gambler, who knows how to turn chance into inevitability. One might say that she embodies the very character of melodramatic narrative form. Appropriately, she is also the character who most clearly personifies coincidence given that she happens to also be named Su Li-zhen. This coincidence revives the memory of Maggie Cheung's Su Li-zhen for Chow, who remarks, in voice-over, "once I fell in love with another Su Li-zhen."

Coincidence and fate are themes through which the films mimic the very same temporal tropes upon which the narrativization of history depends, whereby events are embedded in a teleological narrative. It is true that the women are echoes of each other, but they also represent opposite relationships to history: one stands for the striated and overlapping nature of history, while the other represents an unspeakable, un-representable past. Maggie Cheung, a Hong Kong international film star, embodies the former, while the latter is animated by Gong Li, perhaps the first of the great Chinese transnational film stars; her very presence is already a throwback to the past. Gong Li's presence in this film is no small resurrection, given that she is still best known for her work in the epic melodramas that brought Zhang Yimou to prominence during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Perhaps as a way of memorializing Hong Kong's return to China, Zhang and Wong seem to have swapped leading actors: Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung—well-known Hong Kong actors—appeared in Zhang's 2002 *Hero*, a mythic narrative about the unification of premodern China. *2046*, in like manner, employs Gong Li and Zhang Ziyi (also mainland Chinese) as its stars. In *2046*, Gong plays a woman who comes from Phnom Penh, a place on the threshold of witnessing one of the twentieth century's worst genocides and thus the most plausible reason for why she comes to embody the un-representable. Her character, whose past we are told is mysterious and inaccessible, embodies a dual history, given that, as star text, she also points toward China's traumatic past, vis-à-vis her key role in many of the historical epics directed by Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige in which she played the lead.[41]

If "melodramatic" proves to be a recurring adjective used to describe these films, by contrast, a term that is not used to refer to them, and that just as easily could be, is that of costume drama, that particular type

of historical filmmaking that Robert A. Rosenstone defines as a "feature set in the past which is no more than a kind of exotic realm for love and adventure."[42] In fact, Rosenstone goes to some length to avoid using the term "historical" to refer to this type of dramatic film because he argues that the term "historical" should be reserved for films that explicitly attempt to address and answer the questions that have surrounded a given historical topic.[43] In other words, for Rosenstone, costume dramas are films set in the past that, at the same time, do not ultimately "pose serious questions of, and make serious interpretations about, the meaning of the past."[44] *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* could easily be described as being the kind of costume dramas that employ history as mere setting for their stories of failed romance. Yet, though Rosenstone believes that historical drama must essentially produce a strong emotional response in the spectator, he veers away from describing such films as melodramatic. In fact, he considers a key element of the historical film to be the way that it provides an embodied, visceral experience. In other words, it "does not simply provide an image of the past, it wants you to feel strongly about that image—specifically about the characters involved in the historical situations it depicts."[45] Melodrama is actually a mode that straddles both types of filmmaking (the costume and the historical drama), especially because it is given over to "[u]sing image, music, and sound effect along with the spoken (and shouted, whispered, hummed, and cooed) word" to elicit emotion.[46] What, then, does it mean to animate history through feeling, especially when the feeling is one that recognizes how irretrievable the past that it represents already is?

Inarguably, *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* are costume dramas; the love affairs at their center are set against the backdrop of lavishly reconstructed interiors of a bygone era. As we have seen, the retrospective quality of both films has lent them to be discussed predominantly as works of memory that are also about memory—about the ways in which memory can hold the past in perfect stillness, like a photograph that might blur around the edges or a picture that can be composed and recomposed, at times painstakingly embellished, over time. The films recognize memory as changeable, as something that is more reliant on the texture of affect than on fact. Indeed, the texture, color, and composition of the images alongside the actresses' impeccable costumes—more than the narrative of their ill-fated love affairs—are what invite multiple viewings of these films. Yet, the very costumes of these costume dramas, no doubt part of what holds our fascination with these films, actually betray that much more is going on at their core. In the case of *In the Mood for Love*, Maggie Cheung as Su Li-zhen changes costume upward of 50 times, each a form-fitting cheongsam dress, and each boasting a stunning pattern (she wears approximately 22 dresses

Figure 2.3 *In the Mood for Love*, Maggie Cheung's Su Li-zhen

Figure 2.4 *2046*, Gong Li's Su Li-zhen

in total).[47] Her costume changes are the closest thing the film has to a time-keeping device. In remarkable contrast, in *2046* Black Spider, Gong Li's Su Li-zhen wears only a black cheongsam dress paired with a single, elbow-length black glove (figures 2.3 and 2.4). Chow's voice-over ruminations place particular emphasis on the hand that she always keeps covered in black; Chow suspects that it is somehow also tied to her equally hidden, mysterious past.

As much as Maggie Cheung's patterned cheongsams evoke Hong Kong of the 1960s, they also serve, as Pam Cook has observed, to express the tension between tradition and modernity. As she argues, the dresses register

the Westernization of traditional Chinese dress under the influence of a rising, global consumer capitalism:

> The cheongsam, an icon of Chinese womanhood, was appropriated by Western designers in the 1950s and 1960s. The figure-hugging tunic dress, with its high collar and slit skirt, is a hybrid of traditional Chinese design and Western-style, both exotic and erotic in its connotations. On one hand, it designates sexual emancipation, social status and financial independence; on the other, because of its association with prostitution and Western decadence, it suggests poverty and oppression.[48]

The cheongsam, in fact, evolved as a feminist statement when women started wearing men's long robes as an anti-Qing gesture.[49] It was in Shanghai in the 1920s that the cut adopted its tighter, figure-hugging shape. Then, with the rise of the Communist Party in the late 1940s and 1950s, "the dress, and the decadent Shanghai style it invoked, was restricted," explains Osmand Chang, assistant curator of an exhibition in 2014 of the cheongsam at the Hong Kong Museum of History for the century celebration of the iconic dress' presence in Hong Kong culture.[50] Chang explains that Shanghai tailors fled to Hong Kong in the 1950s and 1960s, thereby bringing the cheongsam with them. The 1960s are thus considered a kind of "golden era" for the cheongsam in Hong Kong.

In *In the Mood for Love*, we learn that Mrs. Chan goes to the movies by herself in order to "pass the time," a clue that also invites us to read her dresses as references to Chinese film stars of the past, actresses among whose lineage Maggie Cheung is herself situated. Su Li-zhen's neighbor and landlady seem keenly aware of the anachronism of her dress, when at one point one of them remarks: "she dresses up like *that* to go out for noodles?" Among the movies that Su Li-zhen may or may not have been watching at the time was a 1960 American film, *The World of Suzie Wong*, about a British artist who arrives in Hong Kong's Wan Chai district, moves into a hotel that also functions as a brothel (much like the case of the hotel in *2046*, which is also set in Wan Chai), and falls in love with a prostitute. The film, starring Nancy Kwan and William Holden, is credited for popularizing a version of the cheongsam in the United States where the dress, in fact, takes the name "Suzie Wong." Today, as the apprenticeship and tradition of making cheongsams diminishes as a craft in Hong Kong, manufacturing has moved back to factories in mainland China, where the dresses can now be produced en masse, with some of the factories employing as many as 250 garment-makers.[51] In line with melodramatic logic, what Wong accomplishes through Maggie Cheung's costume changes is to displace history

onto the mise-en-scène: decades of transnational exchange, in terms of both fashion and the production of an Orientalist imaginary. Commercialization, globalization, and a transnational appropriation back and forth between China, Hong Kong, Britain, and the United States mark the complex history of the dresses that Maggie Cheung wears and the stories that Wong Kar-wai tells as he screens the past for us.[52] Maggie Cheung's cheongsams, along with their history, literally envelop and mold her body, a reminder of how bodies are shaped by the historical contexts in which they are ensconced; they urge our recognition of the fact that just beyond the surface of what we see, there is an entire fabric of history weaved out of coincidence and fate that envelops the present era in which we live. Making reference to the solid black outfit worn by the second Su Li-zhen in *2046*, Chow Mo-wan tells us in voice-over:

> She always wore black. They called her Black Spider. She kept her glove on for 365 days of the year. Nobody knew why for sure. Had her hand been chopped off for cheating? Did the glove cover up a fake hand? Nobody really knew . . . it struck me that her past was like the hand she always kept gloved. A mystery with no solution.

By contrast, the black of Gong Li's cheongsam and glove acknowledges just the opposite of the costumes worn by Maggie Cheung: it refers to an irrecoverable past, one that exceeds the reach of meaning.

Marcia Landy has observed that "the past is not inherited in a consistent, logical, and unified fashion."[53] Instead, she notes that it is made up of shards that then become embedded in forms and formats that attempt to make sense of them. In Landy's estimation, historical films employ melodrama precisely because melodrama has the capacity to endow events with an affective charge, in effect reanimating said events.[54] For this reason, she argues that "the cement for these fragments is affective, for the investment in the past is melodramatic."[55] This melodramatic rendering of history resonates with Hayden White's observation regarding "historical metafiction," where the relationship between real and imaginary events collapses: "Everything is presented as if it were of the same ontological order, both real and imaginary—realistically imaginary or imaginarily real, with the result that the referential function of the images of events is etiolated."[56] The costumes in these costume dramas thus demonstrate how melodrama, and its penchant for displacing meaning onto its mise-en-scène, can collapse historically significant (monumental) and trivial (personal, ordinary) events, between past and present, and between experience and its representation. The personal and the historical are thus conflated.

Time's Black Hole

To return, briefly, to where I began: melodrama is the genre best endowed with the capacity to make us cry. Steve Neale, updating the work Franco Moretti has done in the realm of boys' literature for film, insists on how the tears that melodramatic narratives elicit from their viewers underline the knowledge of time's irreversibility: our recognition of the past's irretrievability elicits the pathos so often associated with the melodramatic mode.[57] But melodrama's tears, as Linda Williams points out, also produce an effect of the defiance of time. In other words, as much as its narratives push us, like the flow of time, relentlessly forward, its ultimate wish is to take us *back* in time. As Williams notes, "[t]he 'main thrust' of melodramatic narrative, for all its flurry of apparent linear action, is to get back to the beginning."[58] Melodrama thus undergirds the sentiment expressed by Bai Ling in her emotional appeal to Chow in *2046*: "why can't it be like it was before?" Melodrama recognizes, Williams tells us, that "time is the ultimate object of loss."[59] The impossibility that structures the geopolitical reality of Hong Kong's return to China—one that might (imaginarily) constitute a kind of return to a place of origin—is thus reflected in the interactions of the characters in *In the Mood for Love* and *2046*. In so doing, Wong has crafted dramas that speak, in affective terms, of Hong Kong's predicament as a borrowed place, both postcolonial and post-national. At the same time, by employing melodrama's conflicting momentums, which allow for different temporal parameters to coexist, Wong also employs melodrama as a tool through which to investigate the question of history: how it is accessed, how it repeats, and how film reconstructs and reenacts it.

In his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Walter Benjamin remarks:

> The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again . . . For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.[60]

Memories, Benjamin goes on to note, appear to be recognized at "a moment of danger"; this moment of danger, in turn, changes both the content of the tradition (how the past has been remembered, historically) and the receiver.[61] After the 1997 handover, which ended Hong Kong's colonial relationship to Britain, Hong Kong is left to navigate through the uncertain territory that its "one country, two systems" agreement with China represents. Its 50-year limbo raises the question of how one represents the history of a place that is to be suspended in time, and yet inevitably, as it must, also move forward through it. Might we consider such a transitional

period to belong to what Benjamin ambiguously denotes as a moment of "danger"? Wong's films reverberate with Benjamin's idea that past and present mutually illuminate each other, interchanging across temporal frames. In fact, their mode of presentation seems to channel Benjamin's famous notion that the angel of history can only see "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet."[62]

The dizzying array of temporalities that *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* set in motion allows the films to address the medium's role and capacity for representing history and constructing narrative, especially in the wake of cinema's own transformation from analog to digital forms of capture and delivery. In this manner, the question of Hong Kong's uncertain future in 2047 is also overlapped with the question of the future of the film image vis-à-vis history. Though I contend that these films are fundamentally a melodramatic rendering of the handover and the 50-year agreement, they are also interesting for the ways in which they vacate historical melodrama of its narrative conventions, particularly as it regards the representation and re-creation of historical events on film. They should, therefore, be considered as historical metafictions.

Affectively, Wong mines the fact that film is a medium that provides all of us with our separate paths of recognition and recollection: a mechanical version of Proust's *madeleine*: "All memories are traces of tears." Like Gong-Li's Su Li-zhen, the images of *2046* can only hope to conjure in their recipient the echoes of an experience lost. There are three black-and-white sequences in the film: the first a familiar scene of two lovers in the backseat of a cab, Tony Leung and Zhang Ziyi. We've seen almost the exact same images of lovers in cabs in *Happy Together* and *In the Mood for Love*. At one moment a second scene is inserted, this one, inexplicably, or perhaps as a flashback, is one of Tony Leung and Maggie Cheung, as we still remember them in *In the Mood for Love*. But there is also a third scene, where Tony Leung is in the cab alone, leaning against a window: there is no one there against whom to lean. The film's closing image is one of sheer absence, a poignant reminder of what once was there and now is not: Leslie Cheung as *Happy Together*'s Ho Po-wing (a film that has many black-and-white sequences, so these stray images seem to belong more to this film). *2046*'s closing image of Mr. Chow, if read as the absence of *Happy Together*'s Ho Po-wing (the actor who plays him, Leslie Cheung, jumped to his death in April 2003, only a year before the release of *2046*), reminds us that, indeed, there are places from which neither words nor visions ever return. *2046*, as mentioned earlier, is endlessly referential, endowed with a revolving door of star after star, all people we know and remember from Wong's films and from other films. Revisiting a motif of which *Chungking Express* was

fond, Wong reminds us that canned images cry for presence when there is only absence. Alongside the vertiginous layering of temporality that his films create, Wong Kar-wai's films thus also acknowledge the limits of his visual medium: there are cinematic memories one cannot return to, points of reference that the future cannot hold on to.

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Becca Rosenthal

3

Border-Crossing the Global Imaginary: *The Bubble* and *Babel*

The notion that love knows no borders, that it is blind to differences among people, has proved a rich source and resource for melodramatic narratives. Thus, borders and melodrama can often go hand in hand, since that which is endowed with the capacity to separate us also holds the power to connect us. Through their recourse to sentimentality, such stories elicit our sense of egalitarianism, often in the process of wrenching our guts, wantonly pulling at our heartstrings. Stories of lovers swept away by passion, in spite of their different class, racial, ethnic, or national identities, mean to underscore our common humanity. The same is true of those that frame the journeys of families separated by geographic distance whose members must struggle to stay connected to each other or to a place of origin. In such films, we are alternately transported or devastated by endings—sometimes happy, sometimes sad—which either find or shun our common ground. Yet, melodramas about love across borders call attention to the norms and restrictions to which we ascribe and by which we are bound because, while such narratives repudiate the arbitrary nature of boundaries, they inescapably depend on them for their very existence. And thus, at crucial moments of national transition, dramas across borders have actually helped promote and consolidate an emergent national imaginary.[1] Love stories, then, despite the cliché, do not tell timeless stories; they always tell of the stories of their time. What kinds of stories are told about love and borders in the age of globalization, an era that we are often invited to think of as borderless and yet where panics around securing borders increasingly abound?

Babel (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006) and *The Bubble*/*Ha-Buah* (Eytan Fox, 2006) update this melodramatic convention for the context

of our current, globalized environment. Yet, despite each film's gesture toward global interconnectivity and its potential inclusivity, these films demonstrate how the supposed borderlessness of globalization does not in actuality do away with the border's ample ability to produce taxonomies and distribute bodies across axes that delimit belonging. In fact, in laying bare the paranoias that result from the weakening of national sovereignty that globalization has brought about, they simultaneously reveal the deeply ingrained links between melodrama and the narrative imagining of sovereignty itself.

Babel and *The Bubble* set their narratives across two notoriously fraught borders: that which runs between Mexico and the United States, and that which separates Israel from Palestine's West Bank. *Babel*'s narrative action, furthermore, border-hops between Mexico, Morocco, Japan, and the United States. *The Bubble* showcases a romance, one that is transgressive on two accounts: it concerns a love affair between two men; one is Palestinian, the other Israeli. *Babel*'s intersecting storylines revolve around spouses, parents, and children who are separated—in some cases geographically, in others emotionally. *Babel*'s editing structure freely crisscrosses space, interconnecting territories that are, with one exception, not contiguous with one another. In the process of jumping across these borders, joining different territories together in adjacent shots, the film remaps the globe (e.g., a given sequence takes us from the United States to Morocco to Japan and then back to Morocco).[2] The US/Mexico border stands out among these not only because it joins the only two actually adjacent territories but also because it becomes representative of all the other borders that the editing, in a gesture that mimics the invisible forces of globalization, merely skips over. However, rather than reach for the notion of global inclusivity that its advertising taglines announce, such as "if you want to be understood . . . Listen," "a single gunshot heard around the world," and "pain is universal but so is hope,"[3] the film ultimately concludes by putting all of its characters back in the national spaces where they "belong." As Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Aine O'Healy argue, *Babel* reveals that "not all crossings are equal: when privileged first worlders venture abroad, border crossing is a matter of 'cosmopolitan' choice," whereas when Third-Worlders cross borders, they risk severe punishment.[4] *The Bubble*, for its part, concludes by relocating the actual border where the two lovers initially meet (at an Israeli checkpoint) to the middle of a street in Tel Aviv where the love affair ends in an explosion, thus reinstating the border and its violence. Following in the vein of *Babel*'s taglines, *The Bubble*'s story plays at imagining a universal possibility for love and understanding only to conclude that birthing such a world is an impossible fantasy. Rebecca L. Stein observes that Palestinian characters

had been absent from Eytan Fox' films prior to *The Bubble*; she posits that their inclusion in this film is indicative of the transformation of Israel's political landscape after 2000, when it began to take a sharp turn toward the right. This shift, Stein notes, led to the construction of Israel's security barrier in 2002, and, moreover, "the barrier was merely one component within a broader mix of technologies of military occupation—including checkpoints, military closures, and a highly restrictive permit regime—by which the state was now endeavoring to curtail Palestinian movement across the occupied territories and into Israeli territory."[5] The focus on the eventually impossible love affair in *The Bubble* speaks directly to this increasingly intolerant atmosphere. Thus, despite their superficial wish for inclusivity and global understanding, both films fail to find an alternative to thinking, experiencing, and embodying identity beyond mutually exclusive scenarios. Ultimately, the wish for community and belonging that these melodramas set in motion crumbles at the border.

The emphasis on Israeli-Palestinian relations in *The Bubble* along with the visceral presence of the Mexican-US border in *Babel* locate the films' representations within a global geopolitics that has perpetuated conditions of statelessness, of people dispossessed of rights and citizenship. Immigration and the Occupied Territories are paradigmatic examples of this mode of statelessness.[6] The presence of these borders, demarcated by fences, barriers, and walls, points toward the multiplication of walls that Wendy Brown identifies as a symptom of a waning sovereignty in the face of a globalized world. Brown contends that the proliferation of such walls lays bare a global sense of increased insecurity and vulnerability, whereby their presence serves as much to delineate territory as to quell anxieties that fold state vulnerability directly into a perceived vulnerability of subjects. In these cases, Brown contends, "the nation state's vulnerability and unboundedness, permeability and violation, are felt as the subject's own."[7] The occupation of Palestinian territory, the displacement of its people, and the segmentation of its population into zones policed by the Israeli state is the most salient example of the new configurations of state power in the global era—one, especially post-9/11, when power increasingly operates extraterritorially or is marked by states of indefinite detention.[8] Therefore, as Brown notes, "the Israeli wall concentrates all the diverse performative functions, legitimating strategies, and technologies of spatial control, as well as the contradictions found in contemporary walling projects."[9] As for the border between the United States and Mexico, Brown suggests that the building of the barrier was the result of the tensions generated between North American capital, which required an influx of cheap labor, and the antagonism that this provoked.[10] The first phase of the construction of the US barrier started in 1990, during the time period of the North

American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations (1986–1992). For Brown, these two walls—the largest, most expensive, and most notorious in the world—are exemplary of the rise of walling that has taken place alongside a worldwide weakening of sovereignty. The Israeli wall is an extension of expansionist colonial occupation; the Mexican-US border responds to a contradiction between the needs of maintaining sovereign integrity and those of neoliberal globalization, which requires the influx of cheap labor.[11] Thus, if occupation and immigration rights are indeed the paradigmatic examples of "statelessness," whereby sovereignty asserts itself in the mode of expulsion and containment, and walls are a response to a perceived violence to the nation, then *Babel* and *The Bubble* stand as exemplar melodramas that speak, precisely, to this geopolitical reality.

The narrative organization of the films presents a kind of paradox: they gesture toward a global imaginary while they also reinscribe limited national parameters that reassert reactionary modes of representation. The films thus turn to melodrama not to undermine its more reactionary expressions but rather to reinstate them. This is particularly true in the case of the kinds of exclusions around belonging that propel national ideology, including its gendered terms. In other words, the films want to have it both ways: at the same time that the global imaginary that the films deploy posits the nation and its borders as archaic, borders are rendered inescapable and even necessary for organizing the temporality that the films set into play. If close attention is paid to the logic that organizes each film's parallel editing, then the distinction that each enacts between modern and archaic temporalities becomes clear. The modern characters in the films are American, Japanese, and Israeli, while the backward characters are Mexican, Moroccan, and Palestinian. In this manner, *Babel* and *The Bubble* illustrate how certain recent melodramatic narratives tap into themes about globalization, yet only reproduce the boundaries of the nation everywhere, presenting us with stories that are ever more devastating in their despairing views of human connection rather than the contrary.[12]

The Global Imaginaries of *Babel* and *The Bubble*

The global community that the films first imagine is made up of characters connected by chance, circumstance, and violence. In *Babel*, a Japanese man has gone hunting in Morocco, gifting a Berber farmer his rifle. This farmer exchanges the rifle with a neighboring shepherd, whose sons, the following day, doubting that the rifle really holds the power to shoot targets at great distance, take aim at a tourist bus traversing the arid landscape. Tragically, the shot goes through a bus window and injures an American woman, Susan (Cate Blanchett), who is vacationing with her husband, Richard

Jones (Brad Pitt). They have traveled to Morocco in a last-ditch attempt to save their faltering marriage. The event sets off a series of interlocked consequences that join the fates of American, Moroccan, Japanese, and Mexican characters. The American woman risks bleeding to death while she and her husband wait in one of the humble abodes of a remote village of Tazarine for help to arrive. Thanks to the unrelenting efforts of the husband, she is eventually airlifted to a hospital in Casablanca. Then, while she is undergoing surgery, the Mexican maid in charge of her children in the United States, who does not want to miss her son's wedding, is left without another option but to take the two children across the border into Mexico. On her way back to the United States, due to an altercation at the border involving a guard and the Mexican man driving the car transporting them, she ends up lost, walking with the two American children in the desert, coming perilously close to perishing in the process. In the meantime, the Moroccan shepherd and his only surviving boy are captured by Moroccan police, accused of terrorism, and sent to prison.[13] All the while, in Japan, the hunter's teenage daughter, who is mute, skids around from one potential sexual encounter to the next—enveloped in a morass of emotion that swings, indistinguishably, between teenage angst and mourning the loss of her mother, who we learn committed suicide.[14]

In *The Bubble*, Noam (Ohad Knoller) and Ashraf (Yousef Sweid) first come into contact during a high-tension encounter at an Israeli checkpoint, where Noam is serving a soon-to-end stint as a reserve soldier and Ashraf is one among many in a group attempting to cross the border. Chaos ensues and agitation mounts after a Palestinian woman goes into labor at the checkpoint; Noam offers help, but the baby is stillborn at the border. They meet again in Tel Aviv, at Noam's apartment, when Ashraf stops by to return Noam's wallet, which he had inadvertently dropped. With the lost object returned, the two men immediately fall for each other. They have sex under an inscription on a wall that reads "love Tel Aviv"—a clever gesture meant to underline Tel Aviv's progressive politics and cosmopolitan ethos. Noam lives with two roommates, a heterosexual woman (Lulu, the requisite fag hag) and Yali, a flamboyant, gay man who is skeptical and jealous about the relationship between Noam and Ashraf. Anxious to protect his newfound love, Noam convinces his roommates to help him hide Ashraf, who is now, in fact, illegal in Tel Aviv. Yali, who works in a popular, lesbian-owned restaurant, Orna and Ella's café, in Tel Aviv's hip Sheinkin Street district, constructs a fictitious identity for Ashraf that includes a job as a waiter at the café. The rest of the story is as much about the developing relationship between Noam and Ashraf as it is about Ashraf's ability to pass himself off as Israeli—a gay Israeli, at that. In the process, Ashraf is exposed to an open and carefree gay life, while his Israeli companions display an

unchecked belief that identity politics can be boiled down to choice of lifestyle. Among the activities in which Ashraf participates, somewhat by default, is the planning for a "rave against the Occupation," organized by straight and gay, progressive-minded, young Israelis. In the meantime, the ongoing preparations for Ashraf's sister's wedding provide a parallel narrative line, which functions as the source for the eventual conflict and tension in the film. She is to be married to a leader of Hamas (a man not-so-subtly named Jihad). Jihad orchestrates a bombing that hurts Yali, the Israeli reprisal kills Ashraf's sister, and Ashraf, guilt-ridden by the homosexuality his sister had shunned and now shattered by her loss, decides to take Jihad's avenging place and becomes the film's next suicide bomber. Outside Orna and Ella's café, in the middle of Sheinkin Street, Ashraf and Noam meet one last time: they kiss, they explode.

In keeping with melodrama's need to posit a traumatic point of origin for the narrative's current pathos, *The Bubble*'s entire melodramatic core is dependent on a non-diegetic deterritorialization that has already occurred, the partition of Palestine to create the State of Israel in 1947, and which has left in its wake divided and occupied territories, along with one of the most politically sensitive geopolitical conflicts in postwar history. The film never explicitly refers to the partition; instead, it displaces the "trauma" of it onto the backstories of Noam's dead mother and of Ashraf's family exit from Jerusalem after their home is razed by Israeli authorities. The cosmopolitan and/or global territory that each film charts is obliquely informed by references to the post-World War II era, a time when the foundations of our current global environment were set in place, and one that marked the definitive rise of the United States as a world power. At that time, territories and power were redistributed. The case of *The Bubble*, which places the Israeli-Palestinian conflict center-frame, is the more obvious example.

What is less evident in *Babel* than in *The Bubble* is what its choice of locations for the film's action represents. At first glance, picking Mexico, the United States, Morocco, and Japan seems rather haphazard beyond noting that the pairings emulate a North-South axis. Given that the film's director is Mexican and that the film is a US production, the presence of the US-Mexico border is not jarring, especially when one considers how immigration from Mexico has become an increasingly contested political issue in the United States, particularly post-9/11.

Babel's choice of Morocco and Japan might seem less clear, until we consider how these geographical settings resonate with two of the best-remembered films set during World War II and its aftermath: *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959). The inscription of these oblique references helps set up *Babel*'s vision of a post-9/11 global environment within the context of the US rise to power

in the postwar era. In the first of these films, Casablanca is portrayed as the crossroads of the "free world," the last stop for political exiles in search of exit visas and transport to the United States. Curtiz' film makes Casablanca the setting for its lesson on the challenges of belonging to a worldwide community of nations. *Casablanca*'s opening sequence overlays a voice-over narration on images of a globe that slowly gives way to a diegetic illustration of the very route that the voice-over describes:

> With the coming of the Second World War, many eyes in imprisoned Europe turned hopefully or desperately to the freedom of the Americas. Lisbon became the great embarkation point, but not everyone could get to Lisbon directly, and so a tortuous, round about refugee trail sprang up. Paris to Marseilles, across the Mediterranean to Oran, then by train, or auto, or foot across the rim of Africa to Casablanca in French Morocco. Here, the fortunate ones, through money or influence or luck, might obtain exit visas and scurry to Lisbon and from Lisbon to the New World. But the others wait in Casablanca and wait and wait and wait . . .

The theme of waiting that underlies the indefinite stays of characters in *Casablanca* is taken up literally by *Babel*: the Americans wait in Morocco, throughout the bulk of the film, for Susan to be airlifted to a hospital. Unlike *Casablanca*, where global connectivity is suggested by gathering disparate nationalities in one place, *Babel* represents globalization by itself adopting a border-hopping structure. The kind of expat environment that *Casablanca* presents, though foundational to today's global era, is different than the global interconnectivity that has developed during the late stages of globalization. And thus, whereas *Casablanca* assembles different nationalities in the same place, *Babel* dislocates them—the interconnection between them more virtual than real.

Further pointing toward a connection between these films and the postwar imaginary that *Babel* tracks, the script for *Casablanca*, then known as "Everybody Comes to Rick's," was received by Warner Bros. studios on the day that the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Though released in 1942, the film is set in December 1941. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* cites *Casablanca* by setting one of its final scenes in a bar called "Casablanca," the only place where its French female protagonist, known only as "the woman" (Emanuelle Riva, credited as Emmanuele Riva), is addressed in English. Resnais thus nods to the film that famously played out the American decision to abandon its position of neutrality and enter World War II, a position represented by Humphrey Bogart's Rick.[15] In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the woman is in Hiroshima to participate in a peace documentary marking the 14th anniversary of the bombing. Resnais's own film thus conjures *Casablanca* while he instead tracks the devastating consequences of

American involvement: the decimation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The disjointed relationship that *Babel* deploys between Morocco and Japan employs these echoes to suggest that the geopolitical map it traces is still haunted by the aftermath of World War II. At the same time, these intertexts also help situate *Babel* itself within a genealogy of films that filter geopolitics through melodramatic pathos.

Babel's cinematic metaphor for globalization, the element symbolizing our speed-driven interconnectivity, is introduced in an extreme close-up at the start of the film: a single bullet. The bullet's ability to cross space unseen is representative of globalization as a "force without a face."[16] Moreover, it also becomes the catalyst that connects all the disparate characters and story lines—usurping the role of the car crash that served as a similar connective event in the director's *Amores Perros* (2000) and *21 Grams* (2003). The single bullet unleashes a complicated web of misunderstanding and violence that is clearly meant to convey the precarious reality and rampant paranoia that propel the post-9/11 environment. After all, the scene that generates the central conflict in the film occurs when the bullet finds its mark on the body of a white, upper-class, American woman, Susan Jones.[17] While working out their sibling rivalry and their skepticism over whether the rifle's reach is really three kilometers, as they were told by the man who gave their father the rifle, the younger of the siblings takes a shot at a bus that is winding its way along a dirt road at some distance away. The editing of the film delays the cause-and-effect connection between the shot from the rifle and the bullet's striking Susan. In other words, the cause and its effect are separated by approximately ten minutes of screen time, which also leaves room for the audience to be surprised by the bullet's abrupt entry into the frame during the scene where we witness Susan shot. Those ten minutes, which cut away to scenes of Susan's children back home, bring the family wholly into the fold of the violent events that transpire. In this latter scene, Susan is framed in close-up as she rests her head on the bus's window, beginning to drift off into sleep. The background is indistinguishable, which only highlights the ways in which this scene could have taken place anywhere. Suddenly, there is a brief noise that is followed by a quickly expanding bloodstain on her impeccable white blouse. The undramatic ease with which the bullet traverses the glass window underscores the fragility of the bubble that encases the tourist enclave in the middle of the North African landscape. The violent disruption of Susan Jones' placid surface is hardly a subtle representation of the increased sense of fear and vulnerability that was unleashed post-9/11, especially given that the bullet finding Susan's body plays out a perception that violence toward Americans can erupt at any moment, unseen and unprovoked. Inside this Euro-American tourist bubble we observe how panic and paranoia quickly take hold. The significant delay between the shooting and its

effect allows the act of the shooting and the suspense it generates to implicitly become the connective tissue through the rest of the jarring/violent jumps in the film, which always shifts locales and temporal frames unexpectedly. The pervasiveness and anonymity of globalization is thus not only rendered invisible, thanks to the gap between the act of the shooting and its result, but it also only becomes visible once it turns tangibly violent.

The time lag that occurs between our witnessing of the act of shooting and of the bullet finding its mark provides a key to understanding how the film sets up its circuitous narrative logic. At the point of the shooting, the film's editing intervenes in order to first establish that the entity that is in danger is not quite the bus, nor Susan's body per se, but the upper-class American home. After Yussef and his brother, Ahmed (Said Tarchani), realize that they must have hit the bus (because it suddenly stops), they run off-frame. Their hurried movement incites a match-on-action cut to an American kid playing in his home; this continuation of the sprint from one scene to the next ends when the American boy takes refuge behind a piece of furniture. He is playing hide-and-seek, a game the Moroccan boys will also have to play, except that in their case it will carry real-world consequences. At this point, the film withholds the information that the two children playing at the home, and the maid who is caring for them, are at the Joneses' household in San Diego, California. In order to mine its full melodramatic effect, this information will be revealed in due time. The time lag, moreover, also introduces us to an unknown voice on the other side of a phone conversation (it will turn out to be Richard Jones'), which clearly takes place between a boss and a maid. The maid, Amelia (Adriana Barraza), is the only person we actually see on screen during the conversation. We are made privy to his end of the conversation in voice-off. Even in his absence, the patriarch's presence reigns disembodied over the home space. He instructs Amelia on the care of his children while demonstrating little empathy for her predicament. He is informing her that he and his wife will be arriving later than expected, which conflicts with Amelia's need to attend her own son's wedding.[18] This conversation is the central piece of the film's temporal puzzle: when we see this conversation again, toward the end of the film, from Richard's vantage point, we are able to begin to line up the events in the film chronologically. This retroactive revelation of the interconnectedness of all the events we have witnessed happens at an even longer time lag, approximately ten minutes before the film's ending. Thus, the kind of deterritorialization that characterizes globalization is echoed in the way in which the dynamics of the film are organized: the narrative splinters space and reorders temporality.

These time lags are central to how the film enacts its globalization-like erasure of borders. We cut freely from Morocco to the United

States/Mexico and then back to Japan, often without the use of an establishing shot. The cuts are motivated by suspending the action in one territory and continuing it in another—inviting the bleeding over of meaning and symbolism from one story line onto the other. In this way, scenes are linked through affective and thematic association rather than by narrative logic or linear temporality. In this manner, the film's achronological structure slowly reveals a larger picture of interconnected events and characters. *Babel* thus aims to construct a narrative that directly addresses the pathos of living in a globally interconnected atmosphere, one characterized by both embodied and disembodied border crossings.

On the surface, *The Bubble* comes across as globally "hip" melodrama: it takes up the contemporary-yet-thorny issue of a gay, Israeli-Palestinian love affair, which it employs to showcase Tel Aviv's cosmopolitanism. Tel Aviv, the locale where the bulk of the story takes place, is presented as a global city, one where the politics of identity are driven by a logic akin to a Benetton advertisement, informed by the kinds of music one listens to and the types of clothes one wears. The Israeli characters in the film are well versed in global, Eurocentric queer culture and can seamlessly weave into their conversations references to Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. And an entire wall space in their apartment is also dedicated to the photograph collection of such queer, global idols. The Israeli characters are also instrumental members of a group that organizes a liberal-minded rave against the Occupation. The issue of "passing" that is attached to Ashraf, who effortlessly poses as a gay Israeli throughout the bulk of the film, also brings to the foreground the ways in which the cosmopolitan veneer of a particular brand of queer identity blurs the lines around traditional grids of belonging. The film reduces queerness to "lifestyle" and replaces the traditional domestic realm of melodrama with the domesticity shared by the three unmarried Israelis: a sexually liberated, heterosexual woman, Lulu, and the two gay male friends.

The Bubble thus equates queer culture with global culture: mutable, adaptable, and constructible. The film engages the predictable: the gay, Palestinian man gets a taste of "freedom" as he is welcomed into the uncloseted world of the cosmopolitan Israelis who prowl the Sheinkin Street district, a sociopolitical bubble in itself. The disruption to the status quo is occasioned by Ashraf's arrival at this happy-go-lucky household, especially after Noam invites him to live with them. The ethos of inclusion not to be shaken, Ashraf is taken in on the necessary condition that he pass as Israeli. In the process, Ashraf is introduced to the kind of sexually progressive politics that are presented as being in stark contrast to his life in the West Bank. The film, at first, makes the point, vis-à-vis Ashraf's passing, that there is ultimately no great difference separating Palestinians from

Israelis other than an ideological one. A further connection between cosmopolitanism and identity-passing is forged when, in order to cross the border into Nablus in search of Ashraf, Lulu and Noam easily impersonate foreign journalists (Lulu decides to pass as French, accent included).

In building their global imaginary, both films resort to the melodramatic trope of coincidences that interconnect characters. The tactic of converging fates that the narrative structures of both *Babel* and *The Bubble* put on display also falls within a mode of cinematic narration that David Bordwell has termed "network narratives."[19] Such ensemble movies, with intermingled causal lines and forking-path plots that bring strangers together, work, as Bordwell notes, because "the more that narration emphasizes their separate lives, the more we expect significant encounters among them. If our people start to converge, even by chance, then we can feel a satisfying omniscience. Their intersection seems inevitable just because we've been following them from the start."[20] Bordwell's focus is on how these narratives cognitively "make sense" to us by appealing to our internalized cinematic sense of realism, vis-à-vis classical narrative structure, which he claims these roundabout storytelling techniques are still designed to satisfy. For Bordwell, these are "exercises in [viewer] interactivity," as he notes that network narratives have also, more and more, veered toward "juggled time-frames" and point-of-view ploys.[21] Yet, as I also discussed in the first chapter, these cinematic arrangements of narrative temporality and coincidence, where crosscutting functions as the cinematic equivalent of the literary "in the meantime," bear a direct relationship to the ways in which the novel develops and sustains, as Benedict Anderson notes, the notion of a temporal simultaneity that is integral to the imagined community: characters that, though disconnected in space, perform actions at the same clocked, calendrical time. Without meeting face to face, an individual may have no idea what another fellow "citizen" may be up to, but "he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity."[22] The emphasis that these films place on interconnectivity is illustrative of the mechanism that props up the logic that makes "imagined communities" function, except that, in these cases, it both extends the scope of the imagination across borders while it also imagines the fabric of such interconnectivity as violent. *Babel*, in particular, magnifies the scope of interconnectivity for a global context given that the coincidences intertwine characters across vast cultural and geographical distances. For its part, *The Bubble*'s use of melodrama's coincidence trope tragically links the fates of characters across the Israeli and Palestinian divide. Such narrative coincidences are what help construct the experience of simultaneity, extending the representation of the imagined community toward a context that exceeds the boundaries of the nation. Thus, network

narratives can also speak to the formation of national and transnational imaginaries.

Yet, there is something different about how *Babel* imagines its characters' interconnectivity, which also addresses the way that imagining interconnection is different in a mediated environment that spans the globe. The elements that organize the jumbled temporal framework of *Babel* (the clues that aid in retroactively reconstructing the film's linear chronology), for example, as well as those that establish the connections among the characters, belong to the kind of technologies that have helped transform our relationship to space and time: telephones, photographs, televisions. For example, we have the TV screens in Japan where we learn of the capture of the so-called "terrorists" and of the release of the American woman from the hospital; there are also the photographs that link the father in Japan to the rifle in Morocco and those that reveal that Richard is the father of the American kids perilously lost on the Mexico-US border. These are the moments that work to interlink what would otherwise be characters inhabiting distant and disconnected locations, and never otherwise connected in time and space. Consequently, unlike the case of more straightforward "networked narratives," the interlinked characters in *Babel* do not meet face to face, and thus the film forgoes the emphasis on the simultaneity of coincidence: the effect produced by their connection across time and space, instead, is that which is of consequence. Elizabeth S. Anker likewise underscores *Babel*'s idiosyncratic network narrative, contending that it foregrounds interconnectivity in order to ultimately underline the characters' separation. As she puts it, *Babel*'s narrative and stylistic features "enact impediments to global communication and connectedness . . . Its disparate episodes refuse to congeal or mesh, mirroring much broader structures that impede and interrupt geopolitical solidarity."[23]

Borders Reestablished

As I have illustrated in the previous section, the network narratives of *Babel* and *The Bubble* perform a more insidious function than that of merely guaranteeing viewer interactivity. The parallel editing that underlines the films' characters' interconnection also functions to make a temporal distinction between characters that represent progress ("modernity") as opposed to those that serve as markers of backwardness ("tradition"). As a way to illustrate how this mode of representation works in the context of globalization, I will turn to the brief example of HSBC's entry into the US banking market. In 2005, as part of its expansion into global markets, the British/Hong Kong-based bank launched a re-branding advertisement campaign in the United States. The advertisements that ran

across New York City positioned the bank as a leader in understanding the cultural and social complexity of the global environment. Posters were plastered around the city, particularly in the subways, emblazoned with statements such as "not every culture has a **nationality**" (bold type in ad), featuring a heavily tattooed Asian man in a red wrestler's shirt; or "in New York the whole world is your neighbor," depicting an apartment building entrance with doorbells displaying two dozen different surnames from Cohen to Kim to Xavier; or, further, "In New York, even the dog parks are multicultural," with photographs of breeds like a German shepherd, French poodle, and Irish setter.[24] The posters were accompanied by images of people whose national identity defied stereotype. While potentially granting us a renewed sense of community, with new avenues for identification, the HSBC campaign also warns that our new, global landscape is mined with opportunities for misunderstanding and misrecognition. This difficulty to ascertain cultural origin or belonging was HSBC's case in point for anointing itself our global translator/anthropologist. Another HSBC ad pictured a *mehndi-* (henna) inscribed hand accompanied by the inscription "**bride** in Delhi or **rebel** on 8th street?" (bold type in ad). This particular advert reveals most clearly how a temporal juxtaposition is set in play as we divide up belonging in the global era. The bride-or-rebel comparison illustrates the ways in which the past and tradition serve to demarcate a difference between the national versus the global imaginary. The opposition of the terms, bride versus rebel, tells us that the meaning of a cultural practice (the *mehndi*) when detached from its national context and ritual function, and, instead, appropriated by so-called rebels on New York's St. Mark's Place, needs to be read through a different identity register. Though clever, the ad demarcates both a temporal and an ideological disjuncture: temporal because the *new*, the rebel as global forager of culture, has replaced the *old*, the bride as sanctioned upholder of tradition. The distinction is ideological because the antonym for the rebel is not the bride but the obedient subject, in her case also imagined as a nationally subservient one. Exactly this juxtaposition between old and new paradigms of belonging, and the incompatibility between them, informs the narrative and representational parameters of a film like *The Bubble*, which posits Israeli gay culture as global and progressive at the expense of setting Palestinian traditions, wedding dress included, as backward, stifling, and, ultimately, deadly. The film's Palestinian characters are thus associated with archaic modes of nationalism. The same is true of the Mexican and Moroccan characters in *Babel*, who are also insistently shot against the backdrop of desert landscapes that call forth atavistic associations.

What this reminds us of is that bullets, like globalization, may cut through space imperceptibly, but the actual price of globality is, at the

organic, human level, quite high and inequitable, and hardly invisible. Injustice, marked by melodrama as "victimhood," befalls the film's Third World citizens. *Babel*'s Manichaean moral universe represents these characters as loyal, honest, and well-meaning. These characters are set up as examples of how we tragically misread other human beings by branding them mere "illegals" or "terrorists." So, despite the fact that the "First World" characters are the ones granted a happy ending, the melodrama of the film—the affective charge that moves us to tears—depends on the audience's recognition of the "Third World" characters' virtue and the fact that it goes unrewarded. Yet, *Babel*'s tricky narrative construction aims to have it both ways: on the one hand, it denounces their treatment, yet, on the other hand, as is the case of the Palestinian characters in *The Bubble*, *Babel* simultaneously needs these characters as placeholders for a backwardness that props up the film's purportedly modern characters.

In the case of these films, the border is the conceptual element that helps divide up their spaces and temporalities into a modern-versus-backward dichotomy. *The Bubble* opens with a view from a reporter's television camera and an Israeli soldier's direct address to it informing the camera/audience that taping is not allowed at the checkpoint. The camera's gaze is aimed at a border where a group of Palestinians are readying to cross. This same anonymous view, as if from a TV camera, will not be used again in the film until its closing scene—when a television camera with a journalist's voice-off reports on the suicide bombing at Sheinkin Street.[25] This gesture ensures that the closing scene emphasizes the ways in which the border has implicitly informed the construction of space and the interactions among people well beyond the original checkpoint's threshold. At one point during the opening sequence, the first soldier, clearly the man in charge, leaves a second soldier to take over the supervision of a television crew; we will soon learn this is Noam, the film's protagonist. After a short exchange, Noam gives up trying to get them to shut off the camera and simply says to them, "I don't care," and walks away. The film's ending, rather than affirm the value of Noam's indifference, will punish him for it.

It is across this border that Noam and Ashraf first catch each other's glance. The opening sequence in fact mobilizes a concert of gazes: that of the television camera and the film's camera that direct our own at the action on screen; the suspicious gaze of the soldiers searching the civilians at the checkpoint; the quietly indignant gazes of those divested of their dignity by having to acquiesce to this process; and Noam's thinly disguised, disgusted look at the checkpoint proceedings. In shot reverse shot fashion, the sequence proceeds with medium shots that alternate between the orders from the unnamed Israeli soldier in charge and the men who are asked to lift their shirts up to reveal their abdomen. The soldier has

to ask the man who we will later learn is Jihad twice, thus signaling him out. When the soldier asks the same of Ashraf, the latter complies, lifting his shirt slowly. Yet, the next reverse shot is not of the soldier but a close-up of Noam, then quickly back to a close-up of Ashraf, the first to receive such attention by the camera (and Noam's gaze). In this manner, the camera records a different set of glances, ones that ever so slightly destabilize the power dynamic thus far presented.[26] This is one of the film's few understated and poignant subversions. Queer desire is thus introduced as potentially destabilizing well before we arrive at the film's more overtly subversive sex scene. Much of the film's hope for a different kind of political allegiance relies on this setup, but ultimately it proves a ruse.

As the narrative progresses, the romance between the two men becomes less an ode to love's transgressive power than a testament to its impossibility, an allegory for the chronic unviability of the region's geopolitical situation. Shortly after the film's lovemaking sequence under the inscription "love Tel Aviv"—one that makes a point of placing the exotic Other, Ashraf, on top—Noam engages Ashraf in a small lesson on translation. Ashraf is thereby familiarized with the nuances of language even before being introduced to the nuances of living outside the heteronormative box. Having referred to their lovemaking as "explosive," Noam explains that the word has more than one meaning in modern-day Israeli parlance; it does not just mean what Ashraf "logically" understands it to mean, a substance that detonates, but it also means "cool," as in fashionable or exciting. In doing so, the film also establishes the gay lifestyle, precisely, as cool.[27] Yet, though the film does drip with "cool," with reference after reference to a global queer culture, its ultimate aim is to demonstrate how the physics of the former trump the chic character of the latter. One has to cringe at the film's unexamined notion that a Palestinian man would certainly know the literal meaning of "explosive," just as one does at the destiny he fulfills by the film's close. Indeed, *The Bubble* will undermine its own purportedly progressive politics at the point at which it turns Ashraf into a suicide bomber, as if it were the one thing that could truly come naturally. It also punishes the naïveté of its well-intentioned, Israeli protagonists by presenting their all-embracing demeanor as dangerous in the face of the entrenched geopolitical reality that surrounds them. Thus, the "bubble" of the film's title refers as much to the quasi-idyllic character of life lived on Sheinkin Street as it does to a certain willed blindness—perhaps best described as a sort of progressive-minded navel-gazing. It speaks, in other words, to the consequences of two self-contained realities colliding.[28] Bubbles, after all, always exist at the risk of bursting. Surmounting all the improbable situations it sets up, the film presses forward toward what seems like a certainly happy ending only to surprise its spectator and

undermine her expectations when, in its final minutes, it concludes with Ashraf detonating himself, along with Noam, in the middle of Tel Aviv's gay district. The border, then, prevails as that which both connects and separates the two men to the very end.

In this manner, the film reveals how its having begun its narrative on the border is actually less about the wish to employ melodramatic sentiment to condemn it, as it is about deploying melodrama to uphold a national imaginary that sustains the existence and production of borders. The border's narrative function supports a division of space and temporality that works to demarcate the construction of Israeli identity as progressive and Palestinian identity as backward, whereby the former loses significance without its being propped up by the latter. In opposition to the gay lifestyle of Tel Aviv, life in Nablus is presented as both traditional and violent—and thus backward in its fierce attachment to normative gender roles. The film simplistically contrasts the open, gay lifestyle, which is coded as global and modern, to the closeted life that Ashraf is forced to live in Nablus. As Noam rhetorically puts it to his roommates when they begin to complain about Ashraf's extended stay in their apartment: "do you know what it's like to be gay over there?" Only at this point, once the "danger" of being gay in Nablus is established, does the film introduce the subplot with which the primary story will eventually collide. It happens via a phone conversation between Ashraf and his sister, Rana (Ruba Blal), who is in Jordan on her way to her own wedding in Nablus. When we turn to the conversation, Ashraf is in the midst of insisting that he will not marry Jihad's cousin—his closeted status is hereby established when he lies to his sister about the fact that he is visiting a fictive girlfriend in Jerusalem. All the while, we observe Rana as she primps and folds her wedding dress into a suitcase. The eventually deadly wedding plot is thereby introduced hand in hand with an imaginary, homophobic "over there." The supposed progressiveness and openness experienced by the characters in Tel Aviv can only be articulated, by way of the film's crosscutting, by establishing Nablus as the placeholder of social, cultural, and heteronormative backwardness.

In fact, anticipating a new global phenomenon, *The Bubble* illustrates the problematic ways in which homosexuality is increasingly used as a barometer for a type of geopolitical "policing" of a state's progressive politics and/or an adherence to human rights. In December 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton officially pressed for nations around the world to recognize that "gay rights are human rights and human rights are gay rights," as she openly criticized nations that criminalize gay behavior or tolerate abuse of gay, bisexual, or transgendered people.[29] Released in 2006, the same year that WorldPride was held in Jerusalem, the film

anticipates the dynamic that has recently been described as "pinkwashing." Pinkwashing, as Sarah Schulman describes it, is "a deliberate strategy to conceal the continuing violations of Palestinians' human rights behind an image of modernity signified by Israeli gay life."[30] Or, in the words of Jasbir Puar, "pinkwashing reinforces ideologies of the clash of cultures. They reinforce the 'cultural difference' of Palestinian homophobia rather than recognize the constraining, suffocating spatial and economic effects of Israeli occupation."[31] *The Bubble* thus provides a clear instantiation of a method whereby "the terms of Israeli occupation of Palestine are reiterated—Israel is civilised, Palestinians are barbaric, homophobic, uncivilized, suicide-bombing fanatics. It produces Israel as the only gay-friendly country in an otherwise hostile region."[32] The director and screenwriter of *The Bubble* have themselves been called out for their participation in what amounts, in essence, to an Israeli PR campaign. For example, anticipating the screening of *The Bubble* during the 2009 Toronto Film Festival's homage to Tel Aviv, the filmmaker Udi Aloni wrote an open letter to Eytan Fox and Gal Uchovsky (the film's screenwriter), accusing them of siding with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in "branding Israel as a hip Western democracy."[33]

The question of the visibility or invisibility of borders thus plays itself out on Ashraf's body, and his status of being both inside and outside the closet. As Amal Amireh has argued, Ashraf's visibility "goes hand in hand with the invisibility in the film of Palestinian men from the West Bank and Gaza who survive on the streets of Tel Aviv as sex workers."[34] Citing a report by Michael Kagan and Anat Ben-Dor, Amireh notes that rather than showcasing the kind of inclusivity that this film portrays, "Israel systematically denies asylum to gay Palestinians, who are always viewed as a 'security and demographic threat'."[35] And thus, Ashraf's inclusion into the fold of the only Israeli "family" that the film presents clearly reveals the workings of such pinkwashing. Furthermore, the film's closing scene, which as I have noted reestablishes the border in the middle of Sheinkin Street, provides a similar example of how the film rewrites and thus insidiously reimagines a more pervasive reality: it is the Israeli wall that increasingly veers deeper into Palestinian territory, setting up "depth barriers" and "sterile security zones."[36] The wall that drives into Palestinian territory is, in effect, a complex "technology of separation and domination."[37] Also drawing attention to the political realities that the film represses, Stein argues that by 2006 Israeli urban centers were increasingly devoid of Palestinians. Taking this reality in mind, she argues that Fox' work, at the point that he releases *The Bubble*, actually enacts "an ironic inversion of conditions on the ground . . . It seems that the visibility of Palestinians depended on their invisibility within the Israeli landscape: they are easier to represent

in sympathetic, no less romantic, terms when their physical presence has been mitigated."[38]

The border, likewise, centrally informs *Babel*'s narrative and temporal organization. The first time that we have an actual border represented in *Babel* is when Amelia, the Mexican maid, and her nephew, Santiago (Gael García Bernal), drive the two American children across the US-Mexico border so that she may attend her son's wedding. Tellingly, this scene immediately follows one in Morocco where the two young boys first learn that the authorities are searching for the "terrorists" who have shot an American woman traveling on a bus. Only then, at the very moment that the specter of terrorism is conjured, the film introduces the Mexico-US border. Furthermore, this border will be the only one that is actually represented on screen, but it stands in for all the other borders that are not explicitly present in the film. Again, not unlike in the case of *The Bubble*, conjuring the border becomes a way to also disperse it across the film's globe-spanning territory.

The montage that introduces images of the border is perhaps the most animated sequence in the whole film, an ode to the bustling economy and dazzling sights of Tijuana. We cross the border as we ride along with Santiago in his car. His words to the Joneses' children serve to also welcome the film's audience into Mexico: "you see how easy it is to get into Paradise?" Thus, rather than present the border as a barricade, or highlight its gatekeeping function (something the film does revisit later in the narrative), the sequence calls attention to the way in which the porous border is a mechanism that produces not only a particular kind of subject but a culture and economy all its own. The first actual image of the border wall appears as a man is sitting on top of it; he is straddling its two sides as he prepares to jump: the wall is hardly a deterrent. At other moments, we watch segments of the wall that are plastered with large, white crosses that, at the same time, stand as testament to all the lives that the border has claimed. Throughout the sequence, we witness the bulk of the action from within the confines of the car, mostly from the American children's point of view, emphasizing the bubble-like confinement from which they view the world, something that is also echoed in the shots from inside the bus that traverses the Moroccan landscape. Elizabeth S. Anker distinguishes between the different kinds of containment that Sebastian's car versus the tourist bus represents. Anker argues that the tour bus "offers a mobile, deterritorialized zone of supralegal privilege" while Santiago's car "traps its travellers within an inverse locus of extralegality."[39] Anker's reading relies on the way in which the bus remains, throughout, its own enclave of privilege and on how, by contrast, Santiago's car is subjected to undue surveillance upon its return to the US border. As she poignantly describes, the sequence of

Santiago attempting to return to the United States concludes as his car "disappears into the thresholds of sovereignty."[40] Yet, what this conclusion demonstrates is that the way in which the border delimits space and belonging is also determined by the directionality in which the car travels. When the car travels South toward Mexico, it, too, like the bus, retains its sovereign status (notably the emphasis is on the American children's view from the inside out), while when it travels North and attempts to cross the US border (and the American children are asleep in the backseat, no longer controlling the camera's access to the visual field), only then does the space of the car become vulnerable: it invites the gaze from the outside in.

Further forging the link between car and bus, just after the Mexican landscape is introduced in the film, the subsequent cut takes us back to the Moroccan desert and to the tourist bus that arrives in the town of Tazarine. This association links both spaces and in effect makes them representative of the border and of the threatening Other. The first thing that the American boy asks as they cross the border is "my mother told me that Mexico is really dangerous?" which prompts Santiago's ironic answer, "yes, it's full of Mexicans!"; likewise, one of the European tourists says to Richard, in an effort to dissuade him from staying in Tazarine, "in Egypt, in a town like this, they slit thirty German tourists' throats." As the bus arrives in Tazarine, a similar montage to that which introduced the Mexican border, albeit more subdued, enlists the same trope of observing the surrounding landscape from within the confines of a moving vehicle, in this case the tourists' bus. In other words, once the film presents the US-Mexico border, it subsequently employs similar cinematic language to code the ways in which the border is metaphorically transposed onto a global landscape, one where American privilege and power still organizes geopolitical space—the bus, as Anker notes, is indeed a "travelling enclave of exception."

In this switch back and forth between Mexico and Morocco, the two spaces are meshed. At first, the film presents them sequentially, as two separate stories, but the editing progressively makes evident that these locales are narratively subservient to the two "First World" narratives: that of the Americans awaiting rescue in their temporary abode in Tazarine (signaling how Americans have the power to avail themselves of temporary "abodes" worldwide), and that which takes place in Japan. Nowhere is this displayed more clearly than at the end of the film, when the news that the young Moroccan child has been taken into custody is followed by the scene of Amelia's capture as well, after she is discovered wandering in the desert by the border patrol. *Babel*'s parallel editing, in fact, only cuts between Mexico and Morocco and between Morocco and Japan. Only at the very end of the narrative, once Amelia is being prepared for deportation, do

we have the first and only cut that occurs between Japan and the Mexico narrative. But, when this cut happens, it seems to be because it takes us between Japan and the deportation offices of the US government. The film thus firmly sustains its North-North and South-South allegiances despite all of its apparent globe hopping.

The border-crossing and deportation narrative, rendered explicitly in the case of the Mexico segment, is yet another undercurrent that potentially informs the choice of Morocco as one of the locales for the film's narrative action. Tazarine is in one of Morocco's southern provinces, while in the north of Morocco the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and their border fences have been dubbed "the border-fence of Europe."[41] In 2005, a year before the film's release, hundreds of African migrants would arrive at the fence en masse, and Spanish civil guard and Moroccan officers would fire at them, killing some and wounding many.[42] This incident brought international attention to the Spanish borders in Morocco, which ever since have only been expanding their fortification capabilities. In *Babel*, Mexico as Morocco (and Morocco as Mexico) together function to turn the dynamic of the US-Mexico border into one that underpins a broader global reality.[43]

Moreover, in these films that ultimately reestablish national and patriarchal parameters, women represent the violent and divisive qualities of the border itself. In melodrama, territory has always been represented as gendered female or otherwise feminized: territories are to be conquered, penetrated, usurped, and protected. This is true in the case of how both land and home, employed as microcosms of the nation, are figured. Yet, these films feature the border not as a limit to national territory but as a space that is itself represented in feminized terms. For example, the physical presence of the US-Mexico border in *Babel* is linked to the body of the Mexican maid who crosses it in the red dress that she wore to her son's wedding (figure 3.1).[44] She is the only character in the film, along with the American children in her care, to be framed for any extensive period of time in the unforgiving, in-between space of the US/Mexico border. As Marciniak, Imre, and O'Healy observe, Amelia's body is particularly burdened by the responsibility to signify the distinction between "citizen" and "alien."[45] Amelia's crossing the border with the two American children without permission from their parents should strike any viewer as an implausible scenario. Moreover, the authors rightly point to one of the film's most jarring contradictions: "If Amelia is really illegal, why does she attempt to cross the border at an inspection point?"[46] Rather than driven by logic, the authors go on to suggest that Amelia's role is important in the film given how she signals toward conflicting notions of "home," especially because her presence and intimate link to the American family questions the nuclear character of that family. As they note, she is

Figure 3.1 *Babel*, US/Mexico border

"both useful and necessary to the nation's economic, familial, and affective well-being."[47] Yet, at the same time, her status within that affective network is inherently precarious. Her role as a liminal and contingent part of the intimate locus of the family is tellingly revealed at the border, when the children awake and Debbie disavows her primary caretaker by confirming to the border patrol that Amelia is, in fact, not her aunt. As Anker observes, "Debbie's rejection of Amelia exhibits the very yearning for unity and identity that informs insular conceptions of domestic space and lends ideological sanction to restrictive immigration policies—casting her, like her mother, as a mouthpiece for the biases subtending American exceptionalism."[48]

Likewise, the Israeli checkpoints in *The Bubble* are tied, in one case, to the body of a pregnant woman, and, at another, to a woman carrying her wedding dress across it (figure 3.2). As I noted earlier, *The Bubble* begins at a checkpoint that announces, in the exchange of gazes between Noam and Ashraf and their subsequent love affair, the ability of queer desire to skip over geopolitical differences. Yet, in retrospect, this sequence at the checkpoint predicts the catastrophic fate of the love affair over the body of a pregnant woman. Just after Ashraf and Noam have exchanged glances, the camera breaks rhythm once again, this time by presenting us with a close-up of a woman's hands clutching her belly. The officer's voice off-screen demands that she show him her belly. A female soldier intervenes and insists, and the woman opens up her coat to reveal her still clothed pregnant belly. Now satisfied, the soldiers permit the group of Palestinians to move across the border. Yet, just as she prepares to cross the border, the

Figure 3.2 *The Bubble*, Israeli checkpoint

woman goes into labor. This produces the first dramatic sequence in the film. Like the role that the bullet plays in *Babel*'s narrative, here, the catalyst that orchestrates the characters' meeting is a birth scene at the border. Noam tries to help, and an ambulance is called, yet despite their efforts the woman's baby is stillborn. The film therewith announces that its central metaphor, rather than point toward new beginnings or queer subversions, is one of inviability. The film's abortive hope is thus established through a budding queer desire and a Palestinian woman's womb.

Later in the narrative of *The Bubble*, there will be a second altercation at the border, this time when Rana crosses the checkpoint with her wedding dress. Asked to remove the dress from its suitcase, Rana worries that it will get soiled. As noted earlier, Rana's wedding is the narrative thread that irretrievably disrupts the romance between Noam and Ashraf; she dies during an Israeli raid aimed at capturing Jihad. Ashraf will then request to avenge her. In fact, this is the event that most melodramatically highlights the incompatibility between Ashraf's sexuality and his life in Nablus. The conundrum that has him caught between tradition and freedom is captured by the carefully staged image during the scene where he is mourning his sister's death. In this scene, we observe Ashraf's grief for his sister transform into disgust at himself: he is sitting next to her wedding dress and crumples a poster, announcing the rave against the Occupation, where he appears with his Israeli friends. He is emotionally caught between both poles, visually represented in the fact that he sits between the poster and the wedding dress. The wedding dress, moreover, serves as a reminder of the border and its violence. The misogyny that the film displays is further emphasized by the dislike it demonstrates toward a heterosexual ritual

Figure 3.3 *The Bubble*, rave poster and wedding dress

that, by focusing on the wedding dress, it feminizes (figure 3.3; see also figure 3.5).

As with *The Bubble*, the chance event that incites the central narrative complication in *Babel* also happens over the imperiled body of a woman. The melodramatic narrative "chase" is enacted around the purpose of rescuing Susan. In other words, the film's suspense hinges around the question of whether Susan will be rescued in time, or whether she will bleed to death in the village hut where she and her husband await for help to arrive. Furthermore, the emphasis on Susan's injured body proves to be the central example of how female victimization also provides a common thematic thread among all four stories.[49] For Anker, this is an example of how *Babel* plays out its geopolitical crises of sovereignty by enacting them on the bodies of female characters.[50] As Anne McClintock has reminded us, there is a paradox inherent in the formulation of national narrative given that, despite its function in legitimizing power between men, it relies on the iconography of familial and domestic space, traditionally gendered feminine.[51] In the cases I have outlined above, the gendering of the border space as feminine itself accomplishes the necessary division of space and time that is essential to reproducing a national imaginary.

Enclosures and Mythic Origins: Reimagining National Sovereignty

As we have seen, borders are central to demarcating particular arrangements of temporality as well as integral to how bodies are marked differently by geopolitical power. Borders fundamentally delimit national

territory and, as Benedict Anderson and others have noted, they are crucial to how we imagine sovereignty as a bounded concept. In fact, for Brown, sovereignty is intrinsically a "border concept," both because it delineates an entity and because through such a division it sets the terms for how space is to be organized, delimiting inside from outside.[52] Walls, she notes, cannot block out without shutting in. Accordingly, enclosure is a figure that lies at the core of the foundations of political sovereignty, and therefore also reappears at the moment of its dissipation.[53] In a manner that is counterintuitive, the crisis of sovereignty leads to the multiplication, not the erasure, of borders. As Brown observes in her discussion of the effects that waning sovereignty has had on the building and sustaining of walls and borders, "the promise of a globally connected human world, one bathed in liberal freedoms, is contravened by one in which cement, barbed wire, checkpoints and surveillance appear the norm."[54]

The trope of enclosure plays out literally in *Babel* in regard to the Americans, as if to call attention to the paradoxical insularity of one of globalization's dominant players. But also, if one extrapolates from Brown's observations, the structural trope ultimately conveys American sovereignty's perceived crisis. All we really see of the United States in the film (with the exception of a short moment when the nanny knocks on the door of another home asking a fellow maid for help) is a medium shot of the Joneses' living room, and the children's bedroom. Otherwise, we associate the Americans with the bus, and, once off the bus, they mostly remain confined within the four walls of the room where Susan convalesces.[55] This motif of enclosure is supported through the end when a Red Cross helicopter finally arrives to enact the melodramatic last-minute rescue. The helicopter becomes the perfect visual and narrative metaphor of their privilege as they fly over the Moroccan landscape, now cocooned from it. The Joneses' remain withdrawn from the surrounding context throughout, yet their privilege is reflected in the fact that the narrative hinges, nonetheless, on their family's drama.[56]

The absolute centrality of the American story becomes evident shortly after the helicopter ride, when we finally witness the other end of the aforementioned conversation between Amelia and Richard. It had first occurred only ten minutes into the film, and now, with less than ten minutes left before the film's conclusion, we hear the conversation a second time, this time from Richard's end. The narrative itself is thus contained within the enclosure of this moment, the only event represented twice in the film's plot. Moreover, the repetition of the phone call, as I noted earlier, is the crucial puzzle piece that allows us to construct the film's chronology retroactively. Thus, not only the content of the stories but the narrative structure of the film itself mirror a geopolitical ideology

that privileges American exceptionalism. As Anker argues, the confinement of the bus alongside that of the Red Cross helicopter demonstrates how "the Morocco storyline dramatizes how deterritorialized American sovereignty—embodied in the iconic whiteness and phobic self-enclosure of Susan (who is portrayed as a germophobe)—can annul sovereignties even within rival national jurisdictions."[57]

Hand in hand with the insularity of the Joneses' confinement, the way that time works in their segment serves as a point of contrast to that of the other stories.[58] For, as the narrative moves forward and violence is unleashed everywhere, all the Americans do is wait in the village hut—an echo of *Casablanca*'s "[they] wait and wait and wait." In this case, the Americans wait it out, it seems, for order to be restored. And in fact, only once the Moroccan farmers have been apprehended and Amelia has been taken into custody does Blanchett's character finally emerge from her confinement to be airlifted to the hospital in Casablanca, where her life will be saved and thus the American couple can eventually return home to the United States. The audiences' relief is compounded when we also learn that their children have been rescued from imminent death. Time and the physical safety of the American nuclear family unit are reestablished only once the global chaos into which the film had plunged the Americans has run its course.

The film's structure of confinement, along with the oblique intertextual references to *Casablanca* and *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, may provide an additional rationale for the inclusion of Japan as a setting. Japan represents an ideal of insularity that feeds into a particular paranoid imaginary around the need to secure American borders. Not only is Japan literally an island, it is also one of the countries in the world with the most rigid and intolerant immigration policies. In fact, in a country where only 1.7 percent of its population is made up of foreigners, anti-immigration is the de facto policy.[59] If the Mexico and Morocco segments reflect the paranoia that sees the United States as exponentially besieged by both migrants and potential terrorists, then the Japan segment encapsulates the opposite fantasy, one which emerges in response to the former. The scene that introduces the Japanese segment provides a perfect illustration of how the Japan story fuels the wish for insularity. The film cuts to the first scenes of Japan from the Moroccan story, which is really the story of the besieged American family. The bloody scenes, often punctuated by Susan Jones' screams, stand in stark contrast to the quasi-antiseptic and near-silent scenes in Japan—where the main protagonist is a deaf and mute teenage girl. In fact, the Japanese story is the last of the film's segments to be introduced, but it will be the focus of the film's calm and reparative conclusion. Given the violence and sense of vulnerability of the scene that leads into it (Susan's

being shot), one that metonymically represents the messy and borderless "war on terror," the Japan narrative then serves to signal toward a "safe" fantasy space (a volleyball court) where conflict occurs within a contained and well-demarcated territory, with clearly devised rules of engagement. The Japanese segment first appears when the action cuts, rather jarringly, from the two shot of Richard cradling Susan's bloodied body on the floor of the bus to the interior of a volleyball gymnasium where a tournament is taking place (it is Richard's frantic order to "Stop the bus!" that incites the cut). Volleyball is a game where bodily contact is nonexistent and teams do not cross into each other's "territory."[60]

In addition, much like the metonymic role that the Mexico-US border plays, standing in for all borders, Japan likewise represents a modern territory, something we do not see in the US-Mexico-Morocco sequences. Tokyo is the only visible "global city" in the landscape that the film constructs. And because this sequence is the one that holds the film's single mute protagonist, Cieko (Rinko Kikuchi), it also carries the final symbolic thrust of the film's melodramatic narrative. And thus, as Brooks suggests, "[m]utes first of all correspond to melodrama's constant use of extreme physical conditions to represent extreme moral and emotional conditions."[61] Muteness, either literal or symbolic, underpins the excessive gestures of melodrama, a genre fully caught in the anxiety around expression, which in our global era can also be understood as an anxiety around translation. At moments, the film even takes on this character's literal point of view when it cuts to aurally muted views from Cieko's vantage point, something that solidifies our identification with her in a manner that is not the case with other characters in the film. Her muteness also quite problematically suggests that her embodied experience is one of isolation.

Reading Cieko's role in the context of Japan's insularity, Anker compares the film's representation of Cieko's body in juxtaposition to that of Susan's. Anker underlines that the antiseptic character of the Japanese home stands in stark contrast to the infectious threat posed by the nonsterilized Moroccan abode and the needle with which Susan's wound is sutured. By the time she has to acquiesce to being treated outside of a hospital, the film has already established Susan's germ phobia and her neurotic policing of her body's borders.[62] In Anker's biopolitical reading of the film, the emphasis on sterility versus potential contagion as well as the vacillation between absolute insularity (signified by Cieko's deafness) and thorough vulnerability (Susan's bleeding wound) foreground extreme representations of sovereignty and its crises and, in so doing, reveal the immunitary logic endemic to sovereignty.[63] As Anker argues, Cieko's "handicaps render her all too contained, integrated, and impenetrable—as

such an icon of sovereignty *in extremis*"—while her sexual behavior points toward a desire for intimacy that is predicated in permeability.[64] Susan's body, by contrast, has become permeable, and her wish at this point is the opposite: impermeability. Echoing concerns that I discussed in Chapter 1 regarding Almodóvar's films and their reimagining of community, Anker suggests that this points toward *Babel*'s ultimate wish to envision "a modality of political belonging grounded in the messy vulnerability of corporeal being."[65] Considering my reading (territory) along that of Anker's (the body) illustrates how deeply imbrications of bodies and territory are intertwined in the enactment and imagining of sovereignty.

Babel, as we have seen, does not lack in the presentation of extreme emotional conditions, while its moral conditions are presented implicitly by way of its title, which alludes to the story of the Tower of Babel without ever explicitly referring to it within its diegesis. Because Cieko is the film's single mute protagonist and we associate the myth of the tower with the breakdown of language, Cieko's story not only shoulders the film's moral message: it also carries the burden of making sense of the missing reference that the title points toward. The film, after all, does not close with the Joneses' safe return home, though this is implied, but with a final image, shot from outside a Japanese high-rise apartment complex, where we witness father and daughter embrace on the balcony. At this point, Cieko is naked, stripped bare both physically and emotionally, and has been contemplating suicide. Following their silent embrace, the camera pulls farther and farther away, leaving their window only a speck of light among many on the Tokyo landscape. Here, we are both reminded that this story is only one among a million possible others but it also helps conclude the film with a final image of confinement and isolation (figure 3.4).

The verticality of the buildings that compose the film's final shot echoes the failed and fated thrust for verticality that was the undoing of the biblical Tower of Babel. Yet, once again, González Iñárritu seems to take his inspiration not quite directly from the Bible but from the myth's allegorical presence in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927).[66] *Metropolis* is technically a science fiction film, but it is also, at heart and throughout, a melodrama. Though set in the future, it tackles concerns around the rise of capitalism and industrialization; specifically, it addresses the deep class divisions they engender, separating workers from owners (in the language of *Metropolis*: the hands and the head), and it denounces the dehumanizing treatment of workers in an industrially driven environment. The melodrama of the film revolves around the triumph of good over evil, which leads to the imagined (utopic) union of hands and head via "the heart." This is the conclusion, in fact, of the Babel story as told in *Metropolis*, where the closing intertitle announces that "the mediator between hands and head must be the heart."

Figure 3.4 *Babel*, verticality and enclosure

Babel substitutes *Metropolis*' industrial environment for one driven by the forces of globalization. But, unlike *Metropolis*, it does not offer a solution for the division of the world into "haves" and "have-nots"; in fact, the film manages to be critical of the division, while at the same time upholding it. But, like *Metropolis*, it builds a narrative that concerns itself with the unfair distribution of bodies and privileges across the globalized landscape.

Metropolis was released only a year prior to the 1927–1928 transition to sound, and it employs the myth of Babel as an allegory of this transition. Fritz Lang, the film's director, had argued for cinema's utopic potential thus: "The internationalism of filmic language will become the strongest instrument available for the mutual understanding of peoples, who otherwise have such difficulty understanding each other in all too many languages."[67] Because we are made to identify with Cieko's mute experience of the world, *Babel* invites us to recognize cinema's inherent potential to move beyond language. The tower's demise, as represented in the biblical myth, is an oblique denunciation of the global world that *Babel* depicts—one where despite the myriad technological avenues that purportedly enhance our means for communication, we still fail at the task of cross-cultural understanding. In fact, translation only fails at a higher rate, with perhaps more devastating consequences.

If I return, for a moment, to Anker's claims about Cieko's role in the film, the warning that the film sounds by way of its reference to the Tower of Babel comes into focus. Anker finds that the "aesthetic compartmentalization of *Babel*'s storylines mirrors Cieko's sensory quarantine,

emblematizing and enacting spatial as well as experiential barriers to political community."[68] Since, in fact, the film does not conclude with Susan's happy ending, despite the fact that her story is unquestionably that which organizes the film's narrative, but rather shifts its final symbolic focus to Cieko's story, then what the film offers us is more than just a reenactment of American exceptionalism. If the Japan narrative exemplifies the extreme ideal for both territorial and personal sovereignty, then it also offers, in Cieko's struggle to connect despite her isolation, a suggestion that a different imagining of personal boundaries and physical space is necessary if one is to imagine a global community that does not acquiesce to the failure that the reference to the Tower of Babel foreshadows. The myth's story of the breakdown of language is a story that forecloses all possibility for understanding among a vast array of people. After all, as Anker also reminds us, "the politicization of language can consolidate xenophobic nationalisms, underlining its role in codifying sovereignties as it polices the terrain between inclusion and exclusion."[69] It is true that at the end of *Babel*, the "tower" does not fall, yet it is also true that the film is not able to locate the characters whose unfair treatment it decries anywhere other than back where they "belong." Thus, even as it flirts with an alternate imagining of sovereignty, by shifting its emphasis from Susan's story to Cieko's, the imagining of a potentially different mode of sovereignty is still confined to the Global North.

The Bubble also employs a biblical myth, which it also presents somewhat obliquely: the poster that announces the "rave against the Occupation" depicts the film's four principal characters naked, covered only by fig leaves in the colors of the Israeli and Palestinian flags. The Palestinian character is positioned upside down, so even the image's "inclusivity" still manages to set him apart (figure 3.5). The myth of Adam and Eve that the poster employs portends the ultimate destruction that will befall upon the image of unity that it depicts: a fall from paradise. The rave does turn out to be the film's last stop at a paradise-like moment, when the main couple is briefly reunited for what could have been the story's happy ending and young, straight and gay Israelis dance away their drugged-out wish for the Occupation's end.

During the rave, Noam tells Ashraf of a birthday party that his mother had organized for him in a Jerusalem playground. Israelis and Palestinians were both invited, and no one came. In fact, Noam is convinced that this heartbreaking event precipitated the illness that later killed her. In the course of the film, we also learn that both Noam and Ashraf grew up in Jerusalem: Ashraf in al-Issawiya and Noam in French Hill (a post-1967 settlement)—both areas in East Jerusalem. It is thus a place that holds past traumas for both protagonists (as mentioned earlier, this is where

Figure 3.5 "Rave against the Occupation" poster

the destruction of Ashraf's family home by Israeli authorities takes place). Overlapping the personal with the historical, Jerusalem is a shared, originary, and contested place for Christian, Muslim, and Jewish religions. Unlike the ending of Fox' previous film, *Walk on Water* (2004), where the film enacts a fantasy reparation between Germans and their Nazi past and the Jewish people (embodied by a Mossad agent).[70] But reparation is not to be enacted, even as a fantasy, when it comes to Israelis and Palestinians. In fact the situation will be pronounced, by the closing voice-over, to exist beyond the reach of hope. The image of Ashraf's and Noam's prostrate bodies following the explosion that kills them in the middle of Sheinkin Street is already burdened with heavy-handed symbolism. Yet, as the camera pulls up toward a bird's-eye view of the scene, we unexpectedly transition to a home video sequence that rewrites the failed birthday party by capturing both Noam and Ashraf as children, with their mothers, in the playground of Noam's story.[71] The final words of Noam's voice-over, and the images of the two children playing together, for a moment, do appear mildly redemptive: "... let's fly away. Maybe beyond the smoke and the fighting, there is a better place. Maybe there really is a paradise where we can just love each other. I don't know, I wonder whether we ever really had a chance." But, just as a possible redemptive moment is within reach, just as we have ascended into the clouds of a possible paradise, the tone of the voice-over shifts. It continues, "[i]f, even for a moment, we had a chance ... maybe people would see how beautiful we look and understand how stupid these wars are. No, they probably never will." This final nod toward a wholly imagined state of unity that is not to be, the paradise

where these two men could have loved each other, but will not, brings the reference to Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise full circle.

These tangential references to biblical myths reveal each film's investment in narratives that depend on sustaining an ahistorical point of origin.[72] Just as enclosure lies at the origin of the concept of sovereignty (containing land), Brown also reminds us that sovereignty produces its own (imagined) point of origin: "The presupposed or a priori nature of political sovereignty is both drawn from theology and is part of what gives sovereignty religious dimensions."[73] Homi K. Bhabha begins his introduction to *Nation and Narration* with the remark that "[n]ations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizon in the mind's eye."[74] Bhabha credits Benedict Anderson for pointing out this fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the nation: "[i]f nation states are widely considered to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nation states to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past and . . . glide into a limitless future."[75] Both *Babel* and *The Bubble* gesture toward such myths of origin, both from The Book of Genesis. This allows the films to cast a moral cloud over the worlds they depict as well as ensures the de facto continuity of the national imaginaries they depict. Despite the alternatives to imagining national sovereignty that the films court with, their emphasis on global anxieties around security and the protection of borders ultimately lands them squarely on the side of dominant geopolitical formations of sovereignty, both national and individual.

4

Melodrama and Global Neorealism: *Colossal Youth* and *The World*

Both *The World*/*Shijie* (Jia Zhangke, 2004) and *Colossal Youth*/*Juventude em marcha* (Pedro Costa, 2006) are social-realist portraits, films that aim to convey the experience of immigrants in a world increasingly characterized by dislocation, but where global dislocation still finds its place in national locales, places of alienation that house or contain the underclass of our globalized reality. Pedro Costa has made his imprint on world cinema by producing aggressively minimalist films, a cinema stripped of contraptions and conventions, the apparatus dismantled to only the barebones elements that the director deems essential. Jia Zhangke is the leading figure of China's Sixth Generation of filmmakers. Jia's films work specifically against the epic reach and melodramatic gloss that made the films of Fifth Generation filmmakers such as Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige popular worldwide. Given the ways in which melodrama is associated with narrative and emotional excess, along with high production values, it follows that referring to *Colossal Youth* and *The World* as melodramas can seem a bit of a stretch. Yet, these films' interest in exploring the effects of transitional historical moments as filtered through the lives of ordinary individuals, struggling to live meaningful lives, land the films in the realm of melodrama.

Part of the reason that the classification of these films as melodrama may seem far-fetched has to do with how the films blur the line between documentary and fiction, a characteristic that reveals their allegiance to modes of representing reality that fall within the register of neorealism: both films employ nonactors and follow the unglamorous day-to-day lives of its working-class or disenfranchised protagonists. It was Italian neorealism,

after all, that first blurred the line between fiction and documentary filmmaking, igniting a movement that would take root outside Italy as well, as it inspired political filmmaking around the world, particularly in what came to be known as Third Cinema. Thus, the difficulty or resistance in classifying these films as melodrama arises, at least in part, from an understanding of neorealism that sets it apart from melodrama. Melodrama and neorealism are not antithetical: in fact it is the melodrama in neorealism, or the ways in which neorealism redeploys melodrama, which endows neorealism with its ability to so effectively address current social realities. Melodrama and neorealism are both invested in the project—aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical—of rendering the visible world legible. Thus, I propose that we think of Italian neorealism as a watershed moment not just for film history, but also for melodrama proper. The value of thinking of neorealism as a novel manifestation of the melodramatic mode is that it then becomes easier to identify how films of the global era that gesture toward a neorealist tradition are simultaneously caught in the matrix of melodrama.

Neorealism's influence on global cinema has been enduring and profound, and both *Colossal Youth* and *The World* are representative of a new vein of global neorealist films that have arisen in response to the economic crises brought about by globalization.[1] Like their neorealist predecessors, global neorealist films self-consciously stand against dominant strains of cinema, while they also seek to critique the expansion of global capitalism, which like Italian neorealism has its roots in the postwar era. The concern shared by both Italian neorealism and more recent neorealist films is that of the suffering of ordinary people at the hands of socioeconomic and/or political injustice, regardless of the radically different causes of economic and social devastation between the postwar moment and now. Films of the global era that appropriate neorealist parameters as a way to visualize and make tangible the alienation brought about by globalization also avail themselves of melodrama's capacity to connect with and critique forms of suffering and injustice.

Colossal Youth and *The World* are exemplary of how certain global films reorient neorealism's melodramatic language. They do so by changing, or updating, the terms through which the body is represented in its historical context. Neorealism, when it first appeared in the Italian post-World War II context, drew much of its power from how it stripped away the artifice of studio filmmaking: thus its inclination for placing ordinary people in front of the camera, and its emphasis on on-location shooting. These two elements were deployed as a means to reveal and represent the devastation that was effected by the war on the social fabric, including, in some cases, the infrastructure of cities themselves. For this reason, capturing the historical congruence between people and their postwar

surroundings was emphasized. The real-world mise-en-scène of neorealist films furnished them with an inescapable, visual veracity. Moreover, as Karl Schoonover has argued about the films of the Italian neorealist period, an overlooked component of neorealism's documentary quality is their mode of witnessing. Schoonover contends that placing its audience in the role of witness, as a spectatorial position, was sutured into neorealism's narratives. In Schoonover's analyses of key films, he reveals how neorealism stages human suffering as an appeal for empathy: an invitation to recognize a universal condition of vulnerable embodiment and suffering.[2] Schoonover suggests that the way in which suffering bodies are spectacularized within the frame demands the spectator's recognition and, for this reason, he argues that the films' impact is in part predicated on the ethical wish to make global citizens of us all—something that gets to the heart of neorealism's transnational and trans-historical appeal.

Global neorealist films reconfigure the body's relationship both to mise-en-scène and to suffering—they still rely on both of these features, but from a different vantage point. In the case of films such as *Colossal Youth* and *The World*, the mise-en-scène is made to speak for the kind of dislocation that has become a hallmark of globalization, while suffering is displayed on a trans-temporal plane that acknowledges the imbrication of multiple histories of displacement and disenfranchisement that now characterize the lived reality of those left behind by the cosmopolitanism of the global era. In the case of both of these films, histories of past revolutions are overlaid onto a present that stands as testament to their failure. *Colossal Youth* refers back to both the Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974, and the Colonial War, which led to the independence of Portugal's African colonies, especially that of Cape Verde on July 5, 1975, while *The World* points toward China's Communist and Cultural Revolutions at the same time that it demonstrates how they have each been trumped by China's entry into the global market economy. But also, as if to concede to how invisible suffering has become, these global neorealist films push the spectacles of bodily vulnerability off-frame—in effect disembodying it. In doing so, suffering becomes a pervasive reality that suffuses the world of the films, bleeding in from offscreen space. Whether embodied or disembodied, the staging of bodily vulnerability aligns these films with melodrama's concern around suffering's democratizing potential.

Global Landscapes

Colossal Youth and *The World* are not narratives built on the pathos of belonging; rather, their stories trace the effects and affects of not belonging, of being marginal and marginalized. The films track their respective characters' dislocation by situating them against the backdrop of an urban

landscape that, in one way or another, sets in relief their condition of disenfranchisement. In the case of *Colossal Youth*, the story focuses on a select set of actual inhabitants of a Lisbon slum, Fontainhas, which is about to be razed by the government. In fact, by the time of filming, most of its inhabitants had already been evacuated, and, as of today, the slums no longer exist. The characters in the film are all interconnected by the relationship they share with Ventura, the film's protagonist, who pays them visits while he wanders the spaces of both the dilapidated slum and the new government housing. *Colossal Youth* stretches time out, such that nothing at all appears to happen. Ventura enters and exits interior spaces where he engages in short exchanges with seemingly equally adrift souls. Aided by the use of a digital camera and a small crew, Costa delves into the heart of Fontainhas' dilapidation to give us a portrait of its inhabitants. Reportedly, the film's protagonists, in collaboration with Costa, made up the stories they tell for the camera—part fact, part embellishment, part fiction. *The World* tracks a small group of people striving to keep and form real, enduring bonds among the backdrop provided by the simulacral landscape of Beijing's World Park, a commentary on Beijing's rapidly expanding urban landscape in its bid to join the network of global cities. In the film, the World Park acts as a temporary holding space for those coming from China's countryside and who wish to continue on their journey elsewhere, preferably to foreign lands. The ability of characters in the film to move from "Japan" to "Paris" and to the "Taj Mahal" in only a matter of minutes imbues the spaces of the World Park with the fantasy of global access and travel, a privilege that none of the central characters in the film actually possesses.

Given that it focuses on Fontainhas' real-life inhabitants, *Colossal Youth* can only be described as neorealism for the global era, one that points to the difficulty of narrating the deep and pervasive state of dislocation experienced by its characters. As Jacques Rancière has observed about Pedro Costa's films:

> His films are about a situation seemingly at the heart of political issues of today: the fate of the exploited, of people who have come from afar, from former colonies in Africa, to work on Portuguese construction sites; people who have lost their families, their health, sometimes even their lives, on those sites, and who yesterday were dumped in suburban slums and subsequently moved to new homes—better lit, more modern, not necessarily more livable.[3]

Through its barren imagery of almost hollowed-out spaces, the film announces such an emptying out of the "home," in its traditional

constellation, as both an actual place and an idea. Its opening shot indicates as much. The camera is positioned outside a dilapidated tenement building where we witness an unseen figure toss furniture out from a second-story window. In the scene that follows, almost as if to underscore the complete withdrawal of the domestic sphere as traditionally understood, we watch a woman named Clotilde, who we will later take to be the protagonist's lost wife, exit the world of the film almost as soon as she is introduced; holding a knife up to ward off an unseen interlocutor and the film's camera, she menacingly recedes into darkness. Because she speaks straight to the camera, the audience is as much the recipient of her words as whomsoever she is addressing offscreen. Knife in hand, she dissuades anyone to follow her. The film's subsequent scenes are ones marked by this fundamental withdrawal and abandonment. In fact, throughout the film, the traditional home is a vacated presence; a staple element of melodramatic mise-en-scène is thus employed to generate a very different effect.

Colossal Youth completes the cycle of what has been called the director's "Fontainhas Trilogy," along with *Ossos* (1997) and *In Vanda's Room* (2000). This third film follows Ventura through the spaces of the Fontainhas slum and, eventually, to the sparkling-white new housing complex. We do not realize this at first, but the film's sequences take place in both the present and the past, yet, unlike a film like *Babel* that resolves its temporal puzzle for its audience, this film adheres to the atemporality it sets up; we float in time as much as Ventura wanders in space. The temporal frames of the film juxtapose a time around 1974, when Ventura worked as a construction laborer, and his life in 2005, when, no longer employed, he roams the spaces of the soon-to-be demolished slums, the stark-white spaces of government housing, and (in one scene) the installations and grounds of the Gulbenkian museum. It is only as the narrative moves forward that we come to realize that the scenes that take place between Ventura and Lento, who share a shed, are set in 1974, during a time period preceding and including Portugal's Carnation Revolution, when they were both employed as construction workers.

The April 25 coup d'état that brought the fall of the authoritarian Estado Novo and which began Portugal's withdrawal from its African colonies, like so many other things in the film, is also kept off-frame. The coup d'état takes its name from the fact that no shots were fired and, as the population came out into the streets to celebrate, people placed carnation flowers into the muzzles of rifles and on soldiers' uniforms. For this reason, the Carnation Revolution is considered to have been a peaceful transition. But, the Carnation Revolution was the end result of a long anticolonial struggle that financially depleted the government. Costa has expressed in interviews his surprise at learning that, unlike the enthusiasm he felt on April 25, Ventura

and other Cape Verdean immigrants in Lisbon were terrified of being expelled, thrown in prison, or beaten, and thus they barricaded themselves in the shantytowns in which they resided. In Costa's words, "Ventura told me that they were all together, paralyzed by fear, hidden in the Jardim da Estrela, afraid for the future. He told me that the military police, in full euphoria, went off at night to the shantytowns to 'hunt blacks.' "[4] Costa captures the sense of this moment in *Colossal Youth* by having Lento narrate these atrocities to Ventura as they seal off the one window in their shed. By leaving the camera outside the shed, Costa underlines his (and his spectator's) ultimate distance from Lento's and Ventura's experience inside it. This "shutting out" of the camera and our gaze is notable because it is the only time it occurs in the film. By collapsing the past and present of Fontainhas in this manner, Costa's camera captures the ghostly-like presence of those left behind and forgotten by the euphoria of change and progress. As Vered Maimon argues about another moment in the film that points toward the revolutionary fervor gripping Portugal and its colonies during this time:

> The past in *Colossal Youth* is also that of the very idea of collectivity and freedom. In another scene with Lento in their shack Ventura plays a record of a popular song from the Cape Verde war of independence led by Amílcar Cabral against Portugal in 1975: "Raise your arms and shout freedom/shout oh independent people/shout oh liberated people/July 5th means freedom/July 5th the road to happiness/shout, long live Cabral/freedom fighter of our nation." This song, played on a now obsolete turntable, sounds like a relic from a different long-ago time. The song draws power from its clear sense of political agency and the national coherence of the people as a unified "We" combating a colonialist oppressor, but the film marks the disappearance of this collective consciousness.[5]

In this respect, *Colossal Youth* pictures the foundation of democratic Portugal, alongside Cape Verde's independence, as both built upon what would inevitably become failed revolutions. Costa himself has noted that Ventura's "children" are meant to represent children of April 25.[6] In doing so, *Colossal Youth* reveals itself to be an allegorical rendition of the failure of the past to secure a future for all of postcolonial Portugal's "children." And thus, despite its aesthetic austerity and lack of narrative arc, the film enacts a resounding critique of the Portuguese state and its postcolonial legacy. In this regard, the film's atemporal movements help present an alternate version to that of official history.

Loss, in this film, is not just a structuring narrative device, an a priori point of origin, as we have seen in the case of the other melodramatic films this book analyzes, but the only tangible element: cumulative and

pervasive. As Jean-Louis Comolli has described Costa's project of illustrating the life of those in a district now destroyed, the films of the trilogy tell "us forcefully that it is up to art to cast in relief a world that has been lost."[7] And, because it is so fundamentally focused on loss, the story of Cape Verdean immigrants is told more through ellipses and suggestion than through narration. *Colossal Youth* is thus built of echoes and tangible absences. Fontainhas is a place where time has lost its referent and Lisbon remains, throughout, anonymous and off-frame, much like the "youth" of the film's title. The sense of an ongoing time separated from time is produced by the film's elliptical editing which skips over significant stretches of time between each of the long takes it sutures. And, because the long takes are also static shots, it allows Costa to create a sense that his characters are caught both in the spatial parameters of the shot as well as in the shot's single unit of time; temporal and spatial isolation is thus underlined. The setting of the film is barren, spare, and utterly devoid of artifice. Yet, for this same reason, the smallest and most fleeting gestures exchanged between characters become, in fact, colossal; they carry the full weight of any desire for human intimacy and connection, bringing new meaning to the idea that melodrama is a form that arises from ordinary gestures and which pressures the surface of reality for significance. In fact, the emotive effect of the film is achieved through the accumulation of images of emptiness and tiny shards of stories of loss and longing.

Colossal Youth exposes how the real loss of home that globalization has occasioned among displaced populations can only be conveyed by the loss of narrative and the structures that organize and house it. This loss is a lens through which to read the film's insistence upon representing the new home that Ventura visits as completely blank. Its shrieking white walls that in some shots take up the whole frame are portrayed as more empty and alienating than the equally empty, dilapidated walls of the slum space that Ventura otherwise roams. And, as with the home, the same is true of the family. Most of the characters in the film call Ventura "father," yet one slowly gathers that, with the exception of one, Bete, they are not his biological children. Ventura himself addresses the younger men and women that he interacts with as his offspring. In a couple of scenes, he goes so far as to demand of the man in charge of his relocation that the new apartment to which he is assigned have enough rooms for all his "children." Furthermore, in more than one scene, Ventura makes reference to their "mother" who has left him—but at least in one case (Vanda's), he is reminded that said mother has been dead for years. Thus, it is never made clear if either Ventura is living in a reality of his own construction or whether his mind is simply caught in another time, or both. And because

Ventura is the film's anchor, we too are set adrift amid his disconnected encounters, hallucinations, and memories.

In its own way, *The World* also documents a revolutionary failure, one that, as in the case of *Colossal Youth*, is related to the end of a repressive movement: Mao's Cultural Revolution. The Cultural Revolution, which was launched in 1966, was partly initiated as a response against the encroaching economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping that Mao saw as threatening the restoration of capitalism in China. Mao's death in 1976, and the return of Deng Xiaoping to a position of power, sealed the end of the Communist revolution and heralded the beginning of China's particular brand of a socialist market economy. Starting with *Platform* (2000), Jia's films track both the realities and social failures of a rapidly globalizing China, particularly as concerns the lives of those living in China's rural areas, or those immigrating in search of jobs in the new economy; his narratives and camera have proved particularly adroit at capturing the gap that exists between China's modern vision of itself and the reality of just how entrenched its traditional mores and values continue to be. In Jia's own words:

> We're always talking about how international China has become, how well the economy is doing, and how modern we are. People have access to brand new technology, like Motorola cell phones and things like that. So China has suddenly got a very modern image. But under the surface, China is not as modern as everyone—even the Chinese themselves—think it is. With *The World*, I want to show the conflicts between the superficial idea of modernization and the deeper reality of a much deeper backwardness.[8]

The World portrays the lives of a group of immigrants to Beijing who work at the World Park, many of them from Shanxi, the director's own province of origin, which has served as the setting of his previous films. Built in 1993, the World Park is a theme park that functions under the motto "see the world without leaving Beijing"; it features scaled-down replicas of famous tourist sites around the world such as the Eiffel Tower (which figures prominently), the Egyptian pyramids, the Taj Mahal, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, London's Big Ben, and the Manhattan skyline (including the Twin Towers), among others.[9] The juxtaposition Jia creates between the day-to-day concerns and interactions of ordinary people and the simulacral landscape of the World Park, along with the spectacles staged on its premises for the tourists who visit, serves to illustrate the tension that exists between the surface image of modernization (as globalization) and the dire reality lived by China's ever-expanding rural immigrant class, whose labor and hopes are exploited by a rapidly growing economy.[10]

The human exploitation—and displacement—that propels certain economic processes of globalization is further illustrated in the film by the arrival of a troop of Russian women, brought to the park ostensibly as dancers, whose passports are confiscated, and who are soon forced into high-class prostitution. In fact, passports become a trope that distinguishes those with the privilege to travel from those who merely dream of global mobility. In one ironic example, Taisheng (Chen Taisheng), one of the film's protagonists and a security guard at the park, who does not himself have a passport, makes money on the side providing fake IDs. In this manner, the film presents China as a place devoted to "knockoffs," be it global tourist sites or merchandise. For example, another character, Qun (Huang Yiqun), works as a seamstress for fake brand-name products. China's relationship to simulation—of the global marketplace—is thus amply established. In the meantime, Qun awaits the arrival of a visa such that she may finally reunite with her husband in Paris. She eventually gets her visa, unlike most of the characters, who will remain confined to their existence at the World Park. Qun will be reunited with her husband who, we learn, lives in Belleville, the location of the largest Chinatown in Europe. As Tonglin Lu argues,

> Belleville in Paris is also a localized corner where Chinese immigrants conduct business in their own language while staying isolated from the rest of the city. We can say that they live in their Chinese "Disneyland" in the heart of Paris, as the representatives of an exotic culture, while conducting legal and illegal business by importing goods made in their home country.[11]

The world, for impoverished rural migrants as themselves, will continue to remain at a tantalizing remove, while the processes of globalization will confine them to dead-end situations, no matter their location.

As is the case with how Costa shoots Fontainhas with regard to Lisbon, Jia's images foreground the World Park rather than Beijing itself. Though his camera does at times capture scenes outside of it, leaving his film mostly confined to the World Park allows him to create an ironic distance from which to speak of the city's push to form part of the network of global cities. In the process, Jia's camera remains an observer that, through what it chooses to frame, quietly condemns such aspirations, revealing Beijing's progress to be a mirage, at least on social terms. The moments when characters do travel outside the confines of the World Park allow Jia to capture the signs of Beijing's rapid urbanization: we can see the new superhighways, where few vehicles circulate, or we observe buildings stopped at mid-construction, while immobile mega-cranes stand tall against the evening backdrop. Unlike the way that Costa employs the long take in

Colossal Youth (to generate a sense of both temporal and spatial isolation), Jia's use of long takes and wide angles in *The World* makes evident the jarring contradiction between his characters' lives and the landscape they inhabit. As Dudley Andrew has noted, the film clearly distinguishes itself from those of filmmakers such Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige by eschewing carefully controlled computer-generated imagery (CGI) spectacles in favor of the contingencies provided by the day-to-day: "Jia Zhang-ke understands that what he and his characters seek to discover can be neither fully present, nor fully controlled; his camera registers the pain of transitions, of absence, and of incompletion in long takes and indistinct lighting."[12] Jia thus makes a point of recording the lives of those whom urbanization-as-globalization has left behind.

The melodrama of *The World* often emerges from the visual contrast that happens within any single frame. Its mise-en-scène registers the temporal and spatial contradictions through which the characters traverse; they are at once embedded in the spaces they pass through and inhabit, while they also appear to be unmoored from them. These visual juxtapositions speak to the way in which China's rapid entry into globalization has also generated a profound identity crisis. The opening sequence introduces these themes from the beginning. At the film's start, the camera tracks a woman, Tao (Zhao Tao), dressed in a sari while she wanders through backstage hallways inquiring if anyone has a Band-Aid. As she moves in and out of dressing rooms, we meet other male and female characters who are also wearing costumes from diverse regions of the world, representing different historical time periods. We soon figure out that this is the backstage area of the main performance stage at the World Park. Before the sequence shifts to the front-stage view of the spectacle for which the backstage characters are preparing, we pause briefly on a long shot of the park's replica of the Manhattan skyline—with its Twin Towers still intact. By beginning backstage rather than front stage, the film reveals that its focus will be on cultural appropriation and masquerade as much as on unveiling what lies behind the spectacle of a global and unified world. "Globality" is thereby also presented as a consumable commodity. Jia's camera and narrative do not display a fondness for the global China that is so quickly replacing Communist China. And, as is also the case with *Colossal Youth*, the melodrama of this film taps into the characters' insistent pursuit of meaningful interpersonal bonds, made all the more difficult by an environment that isolates them and foils their desire for connection.

Jia employs a mix of professional and nonprofessional actors in order to further complicate the slippage between the real and the made up (though some actors, such as Zhao and Chen, are nonprofessionals who have, in the course of working on several of Jia's films, become professional actors).

Interpersonal exchanges, most of which involve characters struggling to connect romantically with each other, hold together the melodramatic core of the film. Tao and Taisheng have various arguments about her reticence to have sex with him, an example of the traditional mores that remain entrenched despite the "modern" personae that people have adopted; Taisheng and Qun flirt with each other, but never seem to consummate their affair; Niu (Jiang Zhong-wei) and Wei (Jing Jue) also argue but, in their case, it is about Wei's failure to answer Niu's text messages and, despite the fact that they are marked as the more "modern" couple, they are the only ones that ultimately end up marrying in a traditional ceremony. In one of the more affecting exchanges in the film, we witness the simultaneously frail and deep foundations of the friendship that builds between Anna (Alla Shcherbakova) and Tao, two women who do not understand each other's language, yet nonetheless manage to forge an emotional bond.[13] The presence of siblings who yield to the practices and pressures of family hierarchy underlines the fact that China's modernization has not wholly replaced its entrenched traditions.

If globalization is described as a process that has compressed time and space, then the World Park, and the way Jia photographs it, only literalizes the idea of a globe that can be easily traversed in minutes. For example, early on in the film, Jia's camera carefully follows men walking in Chinese guard uniforms across the landscape of Egyptian pyramids. The visual commentary is almost comedic: the guards are carrying huge plastic water containers, a sly gesture that highlights the commoditization of a scarce resource, made all the more poignant because of the desert landscape against which they are shot. After a brief ellipsis, one of the guards arrives near a replica of the Taj Mahal, which we see in the background. A water dispenser upstages the Taj Mahal in the foreground, where we watch him switch out the water containers while having a conversation in mandarin with Tao, who is still wearing the sari. A group of tourists is also framed in the background of the shot. Yet, in the midst of all this visual incongruence, the characters in *The World* nonetheless engage in fairly ordinary interpersonal exchanges. The film, in fact, demonstrates that it is more interested in these relationships than in the glossy surroundings of the World Park.

Though the settings of Fontainhas and those of the World Park are drastically different, *Colossal Youth* and *The World* are similar in the ways in which they speak to the pervasive alienation lived by those economically disadvantaged and displaced by their respective government's push to turn cities like Lisbon and Beijing into global cities. And thus, by focusing on the effects of urban renewal projects, each film is able to address how the global economy further alienates those who were already marginalized by

their socioeconomic conditions: Cape Verdean immigrants to Lisbon and the rural population of China.

Neorealism as Melodrama

Costa's and Jia's films provide a clear example of neorealism's enduring legacy, at the same time that they also depart from it. Global neorealist films share with their predecessors an interest in highlighting the plight of the working class. Yet, a central feature that distinguishes global neorealist films from the postwar films produced in Italy has to do with how the city and the people who are forced to live in them are represented as being out of phase with each other, as if the question were no longer about how to make cities livable again but, rather, about how to continue to live when the surrounding landscape has in effect become uninhabitable. Some of the best known of the Italian neorealist films were shot in cities devastated by the war and which depicted the realities of people suffering through an equally devastated economy. European cities were, by and large, demolished by the war, and films such as Rossellini's *Rome, Open City*/*Roma città aperta* (1945), *Paisà* (1946), and *Germany, Year Zero*/*Germania anno zero* (1948), or De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*/*Ladri di biciclete* (1948) and *Umberto D.* (1952), present as much a drama of the ruined city as they do one of their ravaged citizenry. Yet, unlike in the case of neorealism proper, the decay and devastation that Costa's camera captures has nothing to do with the realities of a war that destroyed cities and ruined national economies as it has to do with a process of urban renewal that benefits a neoliberal agenda and promotes an image of the cosmopolitan city. Lisbon underwent a redevelopment push in preparation for the World Expo of 1998, which aimed to attract global capital to its port city.[14] *The World*, likewise, focuses on the lives of ordinary people, migrants to Beijing, in the midst of China's economic boom. As we have seen, the World Park functions as an emblem for the market-driven, post-socialist Chinese state. Thus, the urban space in which the relationships between the film's characters are embedded is as important to the film's narrative as the interactions that take place between them. In short, *Colossal Youth* and *The World* document a different phase of cinema's relationship to the body and the city, one that focuses on urban renewal as a process that produces both displacement and alienation.

Moreover, given their emphasis on realism, and given each film's desire to allow reality to speak for itself, these films, like their neorealist predecessors, have also only updated, rather than moved away from, melodrama's primary concern: to make the injustice of the world palpable and legible. Yet, the melodramatic vein present in neorealism, though often remarked upon, is scarcely elaborated, as if the melodrama in the films were a

necessary element to ignore if one is to seriously consider their connection to realism. Part of the reason for this is that neorealist films are understood to run against the melodramatic vein of Hollywood films or those that were produced in Cinecittá under Benito and Vittorio Mussolini. But this view fundamentally misunderstands melodrama as a mode that solely supports the status quo rather than comprehending that melodrama functions as a necessary interface between competing ideological terrains and regimes of meaning. In other words, neorealism needs to be understood as a counter-ideological style of melodrama, rather than a departure from melodrama itself.

Arising from the ashes of World War II, Italian neorealism addressed the inability, both narrative and moral, to continue to represent reality by the same means. During cinema's neorealist period (which most critics date between 1945 and 1952), at a moment when the devastation brought about by the war threw parameters of truth, sociability, and justice into question, films found a new language to represent reality by stripping the cinematic image of contrivances and artifice. As is well known, two of neorealism's founding characteristics were the use of on-location shooting and its employing nonprofessional actors, elements meant to heighten a sense of realism, endowing the films of that period with the possibility of telling stories that were relevant to "real" people who were affected by the socioeconomic collapse of the postwar years. Many films in the global era, like *Colossal Youth* and *The World*, have embraced and updated the parameters and stakes of the neorealist project. These films, by different means, likewise depose themselves of artificiality—in the case of *Colossal Youth* by completely stripping itself of it, while *The World* foregrounds artificiality in order to foil it.

In describing the narrative style of neorealism, one of its early champions, André Bazin, pauses to note the inherent melodrama of its films, only to quickly dismiss it: "[u]nfortunately, the demon of melodrama that Italian filmmakers seem incapable of exorcising takes over every so often, thus imposing a dramatic necessity on strictly foreseeable events. But that is another story. What matters is the creative surge, the special way in which the situations are brought to life."[15] Here, Bazin's reaction assumes that melodrama stands in the way of life appearing on screen. But melodrama is not just an appendage within neorealism. Addressing this same conundrum, now from the vantage point of melodrama, Martha Nochimson has noted its endurance in Luchino Visconti's films but instead remarks on the almost enigmatic quality that the term "neorealist" exerts to describe the director's work.[16] Nochimson's observation once again demonstrates how the terms are understood to cancel each other. Nochimson thus understands films such as *Ossessione* (1943), *La Terra Trema* (1948), and

Rocco and His Brothers/*Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1960) as neorealist deviations in the overall output of a primarily melodramatic director. It would be more useful to understand Visconti as a director who explored melodrama through a widely varying set of narrative and aesthetic configurations, neorealism included.

Melodrama provides neorealist films with the allegorical grounding for addressing the state of the nation and for imagining a new Italian nation-state. Nochimson's affirmation that neorealist films contain "a series of eminently recognizable melodramatic narrative strategies" is not only true in Visconti's case.[17] Perhaps the most enduring of these strategies has to do with how the body is leveraged as a means to reimagine the Italian nation. The crucial role that melodrama plays in neorealism is evident as early as in *Rome, Open City*—the film that is widely considered to inaugurate the cycle.[18] Marcia Landy, for example, finds that "the concept of melodrama is a starting point for understanding how [*Rome, Open City*] treats character."[19] *Rome, Open City*'s claim to realism and its allegiance to a documentary-like representational style (many of the events depicted are based on actual events) would not have proven so powerful, nor so powerfully influential, if it were not for how the film endows ordinary characters such as Pina, Manfredi, and Don Pietro with the ability to signify a larger social reality and thus function as placeholders for an ideological project that aimed at reimagining a postwar Italy. On the one hand, in Anna Magnani's brilliant portrayal, Pina is simply a soon-to-be-married, lower-class woman who is pregnant and doing her best to get by day to day. But this portrayal of Pina would hardly be significant if it were not for the fact that Pina is, on the other hand, meant to embody the nation. In one of the most famous scenes in film history, and perhaps the most iconic of the neorealist period, German soldiers dispassionately kill Pina as she runs out into the street, chasing the truck that has carried away her fiancé.[20] Landy notes how "Pina is associated with the fallen city of Rome and more generally with the fallen condition of Italy."[21] The scene at once renders Pina a perfectly ordinary woman, given that she is not protected from death by her leading-lady status, while it also exhibits her allegorical import. In other words, an appreciation of Pina's role in the film must consider Magnani's ability to come off as an ordinary woman along with her character's iconic and allegorical status. Each of these factors is equally necessary for appreciating the impact of neorealism, particularly in the ways it signaled toward cinema's ability to shape national identity.

In this respect, neorealism's goals are not so different from those of melodrama. Pina is the only mother figure in the film and she is also

pregnant. As such, the significance of the scene where she is killed on the street hinges not only on her unexpected death, nor on merely displaying the reckless cruelty of the Germans who gun her down, but also on prompting the recognition that her reproductive capacity has been felled by a foreign power, one figured as sterile and nonreproductive. This characterization of the Germans is established well before Pina's death, as both Major Bergmann and his right-hand woman, Ingrid, are amply coded as homosexual (connoting both deviance and sterility, elements to be "othered" from the character of the Italian nation and its reproduction—in terms of both its representation and its projection into the future).[22] Thus, the future of a healthy, heteronormative Italy is set in contradistinction to the lack of future that the Germans represent. At the same time, by anchoring the death-dealing powers of Fascism in the gunning down of Pina, Rossellini is also killing off the image of fertile womanhood that was promulgated by Mussolini's pro-natalist policies. With one shocking gunshot, Rossellini thus single-handedly condemns both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, making room for a budding generation to forge new imagery and politics. Moreover, Pina's death prepares us for the deaths of the film's other two principal characters and sets the stage for the final scene of the film, when we observe the orphaned youth of Italy marching into the horizon, indicating the possibility for a new beginning. Thus, the scene of Pina's death, and that of her unborn child, paves the way for the possibility of Italy's rebirth.[23] If, as Millicent Marcus has argued, her death figures in the history of neorealism as the foundational "excessive" traumatic moment, I contend that it is because of the ways in which melodrama is deployed to redistribute national iconography and our affective relationship to it.[24]

In reevaluating the parameters through which we should define and comprehend neorealism, Karl Schoonover maintains that the body itself must be understood to play a crucial role: "corporeality was as important as other aspects of the mise-en-scène to making [neorealist] films appear newly real, relevant, and vital for filmgoers around the globe."[25] In Schoonover's view, Pina's slain body, exceeding the limits of the frame, and shot from an unfamiliar angle, imparts the film both with its violence and its sense of realism. Schoonover's analysis of the role that the imperiled body plays in these films is the critical evaluation of neorealism that comes the closest, though never explicitly so, to arguing for neorealism's intimate relationship to melodrama. The way in which Schoonover contends that the body is employed as the substrate that makes meaning both visible and legible and the ways in which it requires us to be witnesses to the suffering it displays (in other words, demands that we recognize it)

are both inescapably melodramatic tropes. As Peter Brooks notes in *The Melodramatic Imagination*:

> To make the fabric of vision into a document, to make the document lurid enough so that it releases the vision, to make vision document and document vision, and to persuade us that they cannot be distinguished, that they are necessarily interconnected through the chain of spiritual metaphor, that resonances are set up, electrical connections established whenever we touch any link in the chain, is to make the world we inhabit one charged with meaning, one in which interpersonal relations are not merely contacts of the flesh but encounters that must be carefully nurtured, judged, handled as if they mattered.[26]

Thus, to consider films that employ documentary-like aesthetics as essentially opposed to melodrama is a stance that misses the point of how melodrama is deeply invested in the visual field and in collapsing the boundary between a surface reality and the meanings that lie latent within it. In the case of film, the neorealist aesthetic is precisely the moment in which the power that film has both to document and to question vision reaches maturity, and thus becomes a new manifestation of melodrama. In short, the melodrama of neorealist films is not merely a matter of their indulging in certain dramatic flourishes: it is the very mode that harnesses and directs crises (on moral terms) at those very moments when the body disrupts meaning and threatens legibility. This is the case of Pina's death, a dramatic excess that needs to affect the viewer at first impact, which then must be both contained and redirected within the narrative. Melodrama is thus deployed to make sense of that which threatens to play havoc (Pina's death) with the sense-making capacity of narrative.

Schoonover's argument about the role of suffering in neorealism in fact bears echoes of Agustín Zarzosa's contention that melodrama's fundamental role is to redistribute the visibility of suffering.[27] In his reevaluation of melodramatic theory, Zarzosa offers the notion that "[t]he particular anxiety informing melodrama involves the fear that the world might not speak to us, that the world might become illegible, and we become impotent to reveal the suffering that informs the world."[28] The anxiety around this impotence addresses the sense, shared by Schoonover, that the role of suffering, and particularly the recognition of suffering, is central to building and envisioning a just and moral (global) world. In other words, the suffering body becomes the vehicle through which the very possibility of envisioning community (national or transnational) is made possible. Zarzosa's claim that melodrama redistributes the visibility of suffering thus makes particular sense for a postwar moment that witnesses a crisis around the truth-telling capacity of the visual document. The discussion of the

role of suffering in melodrama is not new. The unjustified suffering of the victim at the hands of a villain has been a staple element defining melodramatic narrative.[29] What is new in Zarzosa's discussion is the manner in which he grants suffering a primary, pervasive role, which also serves to pull melodrama away from the Manichaeism associated with the victim/villain dichotomy. Yet, though he finds this pervasiveness of suffering to be present from the mode's outset, I think it is more useful to understand such pervasiveness of suffering as a characteristic that needs to be located historically, as a feature of that can more aptly describe the transformed dynamics of post-World War II melodrama. As Schoonover notes, "[t]he suffering caused by totalitarianism, attempted genocide, massive theaters of ground combat, and the deployment of the atom bomb rendered impotent any ordinary means of documentation and depiction."[30] The sheer scale of this reality required a shift in the parameters through which we could come to understand suffering. In this context, postwar melodrama viewed the body through a new lens, one that could speak to a fundamental violence that emerged as a binding element of global interdependency.

Global Neorealist Bodies

The emphasis on a pervasive mode of suffering helps displace the Manichaeism that is generally considered to be a central characteristic of melodrama. By dislodging clear-cut binaries, a different way of visualizing national sovereignty, particularly an imperiled one, is made possible. It is not so much that the dichotomy is no longer employed to represent a battle between good and evil; rather, as I have noted elsewhere, the Manichaean terms of that struggle no longer serve to describe the social and political context in which we live. The victim/villain dichotomy, which shores up the exhausted, yet reiterative narrative of nationalism, is an appendage that still remains present in global-era melodrama. After all, the nation-state has not disappeared, nor have the rabid nationalisms that erupt when its sovereignty is threatened. For this reason, the galvanizing narratives of virtue wronged at the hands of villains have not disappeared.[31] But these are the remnant narratives of an era that also overlaps with one for which a Manichaean logic can no longer produce legibility, moral or otherwise.

Colossal Youth and *The World* are devoid of diegetic villains. Rather, the disembodied presence of the state—one driven by neoliberal interests—acts the role of invisible antagonist. For example, in both of these films, scenes of suffering and bodily vulnerability/injury, which we can compare to the kind of affective spectacle occasioned by Pina's falling body, are kept off-frame. In *Colossal Youth*, we have Ventura's fall from a scaffold at a construction site as well as two of Lento's falls, one from an electric pole

and the other one out of a window during a fire at his tenement home (he also mentions that once he almost drowned in a lake). The fact that none of these falls is represented diegetically changes the terms of how we are invited to witness vulnerability. Moreover, given that these falls occur during temporal ellipses, some of which span decades, or are mentioned only decades later, time itself is identified as a culprit. In the case of *The World*, offscreen examples of bodily injury include Little Sister's accident at the construction site in which he works and, most significantly, Tao and Taisheng's death from gas poisoning, which is the event that concludes the film.

In his study on melodrama and modernity, Ben Singer has argued for how the fascination with bodily peril, as posed by the industrialized landscape of urban modernity and amply depicted in sensational newspapers and represented in turn-of-the-century theater, was transposed by early film melodrama onto its screens.[32] This serves as a reminder of how invested film melodrama has been, from the start, in its depictions of imperiled/vulnerable bodies. In these early films, elements such as the electronic trolley, skyscrapers, automobiles, factory machinery, and similar elements of the technologized urban environment were portrayed as potential death-dealing hazards. In addition, as Singer observes, "[a]ll the deaths by falling, except suicide leaps, were workplace accidents and thus conveyed a general sense of the perils of proletarian labor . . . Some of these falls also underscored the tyranny of chance in the modern environment and the random dangers of tenement life."[33] It is noteworthy that both *The World* and *Colossal Youth* retain a correlation between falls in their depiction of the proletariat even when the urban, industrial landscape has been replaced by a postindustrial one. Furthermore, both Costa and Jia are making films at a time when CGI has made it both possible and popular to represent bodies that glide through space, immune to gravity and thus elementally unsusceptible to falling. The fact that we readily accept, even relish, the spectacle of such gravity-defying bodies has as much to do with the advent of CGI as it does with how deeply entrenched our own bodies are in the virtual universes provided by the World Wide Web and digital technologies. Flying bodies have increasingly become integral to the spectacles provided by global blockbusters. It should subsequently strike us as no surprise that global neorealist directors, like their postwar predecessors, work against the grain of the tropes of commercial cinema, one no longer merely confined to Hollywood. This distinction is particularly relevant in Jia's case, whose style of filmmaking radically distinguishes him from the flagship Fifth Generation directors, Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige, who heralded the turn of the twenty-first century by turning away from the historical epics they produced in the

1980s and 1990s in order to embrace equally epic, but fantastic, stories choreographed to the movements of ballet-like, CGI-driven, martial arts action.

In narrative terms, the hazards of the industrial era animated yet another popular trope of melodrama: the last-minute rescue. The emphasis on a rescue that arrives too late or in the nick of time, as Linda Williams has argued, makes time and timing fundamental to melodrama, and essential for generating narrative suspense.[34] "Too late" is clearly the timing that infuses both *Colossal Youth* and *The World*, except that its effect is not linked to the creation of narrative suspense. For example, we find out about the accidents belatedly, anticlimactically. Thus, similarly to how these global melodramas disperse the virtue/villainy distinction, the deadline structure represented by the logic of "too late/in the nick of time" is also employed to achieve a different effect. Rather than generate narrative suspense for the viewer, the trope of "too late" functions to translate for the viewer the experience of being suspended in time, left outside the frame of productive, or production-driven, temporalities. In the case of *The World*, it serves to highlight the clash between modern and traditional China, while in the case of *Colossal Youth*, it underscores the colonial/postcolonial impasse that Ventura embodies.

In his conversation with Nhurro that takes place on the grounds of the Gulbenkian museum, Ventura tells the story of having arrived to Portugal from Cape Verde in 1972, while Portugal's African colonies were in the midst of their respective independence wars, and shortly before both the coup in Portugal and Cape Verdean independence in 1975.[35] When he arrived, he found construction work; the construction of the museum was one of them. Ventura is not actively part of either revolution, yet he is implicated by both of them. His body stands as a testament to the many others who have remained out of sync with social movements, out of phase with the flow of history. He exemplifies the subject for which these wars were fought, yet benefits from neither one of them. The title of the film in Portuguese, *Juventude em marcha*/"Youth on the March," can thus only be read ironically. As Costa has noted, he meant for Ventura's missing children in the film to stand in for the "children" of April 25: "[p]eople like Ventura built the museums, the theaters, the condominiums of the middle-class, the banks and the schools. As still happens today. And that which they helped to build was what defeated them."[36] Nhurro appears to be one of Ventura's "adoptive" children. During this conversation with him, Ventura recounts the time that he fell from a scaffold while working on the museum and hit his head. Ventura then points to a place offscreen left, but the camera, instead of cutting to reveal the indicated spot, cuts to the scene in the past where Ventura enters the shack with his head bandaged. From that

point on, Ventura's bandaged head becomes a cue that helps distinguish the two temporal frames of the film.

In *Colossal Youth*, segments that we eventually learn to recognize as belonging to the past emphasize bodily vulnerability. Ventura's offscreen fall is not the only fall that distinguishes the past from the present. In fact, the final transition between past and present takes place after Lento falls from an electricity pole. The accident occurs while Lento is climbing the pole in an attempt to divert electricity into the shack that he shares with Ventura. The shot frames the pole, which splits the frame in half, at medium distance; neither the bottom nor the top of the pole are visible in the frame. As the take proceeds, we watch Lento climb into the frame from the bottom and then exit the top of the frame. The camera, as is the case with all the shots in this film, remains stationary: it does not follow Lento's movement up and out of the frame.[37] As soon as Lento exits the frame, the scene cuts to a close-up of Ventura's bare feet. Then, as the camera holds on this image, we see a piece of gauze that unrolls into the frame from the top of the frame (we assume Ventura is removing his bandage). When we cut back to the electric pole, Lento's body is already splayed on the ground next to the pole. He is lying motionless on the ground, his eyes twitching. We never again return to this scene (in other words, this is the last scene from 1974 that we witness), which leaves us wondering whether Lento actually survived the fall, or whether he suffered any repercussions. The downward motion of Ventura's gauze bandage into the frame thus replaces Lento's downward fall. Therefore, what the viewer is invited to take away from the scenes of the past is the sense of it, literally and metaphorically, as a fall, a way of signaling its failures.

Only much later, toward the end of the film, when Ventura knocks on a door that we have not seen before and that Lento opens, do we realize that he did in fact survive the fall. The shot of Lento opening the door is from Ventura's point of view: Lento is thus looking at the camera, smiling knowingly, as if he had been waiting for both Ventura and the film's audience to come find him. Given that *Colossal Youth* is structured around Ventura's entrances and exits not only from the film's frame, but also from people's homes, then this visit to Lento becomes the climactic point in the film: it is the last of the visits.[38] It is during this scene that we learn that Lento's fall from the electricity pole has not been the only one that Costa's camera has kept off-frame. Ventura begins his visit to Lento by gently taking his hand, the men are framed in a slight low-angle two shot. As the characters hold hands and look into the offscreen distance, Ventura recounts what he has heard: "they say you jumped out the window." Ventura continues to recount the event: we learn of the harrowing fate met by Lento's wife and four children as they all jumped from a fire that engulfed their entire flat,

where Lento still lives. Lento is the only one who survived. As he still holds onto Ventura's hand, Lento speaks of his own hands, which are still blackened from having been stuck to the walls from the sheer heat. And, as the conversation continues, the two men share with each other the fact that they have cried for each other at moments when they each came close to death. Lento punctuates the harrowing and moving exchange with a simple observation: "We were so afraid of death back then."

The World, likewise, keeps scenes of bodily injury off-frame.[39] The most significant, also because it concludes the film, is the one that takes the lives of the central couple, Tao and Taisheng, during the final temporal ellipsis that leads into the closing scene. We arrive (too late), at film's end, once the bodies of the lovers that have just been discovered by the neighbors are being dragged out onto the frozen ground of a winter morning. The lovers are placed side by side while snow slowly accumulates over them. Just before the film closes and the screen fades to black, we overhear the neighbors talking about a gas leak in the tenement housing, thereby leading the audience to imply that this is what likely caused Tao's and Taisheng's quiet death. By the time of the film's production, news of deaths and poisonings by gas and chemical leaks across different provinces had become commonplace. The accidents were often blamed on China's industrial infrastructure, which has failed to keep up with its rapid growth. This invisible murder is thus pinned on the shoulders of the state. Beijing's rapid urban expansion is also ostensibly to blame for Little Sister's death at a construction site where he was working overtime. His accident and subsequent death are another example of an event involving an imperiled body whose vulnerability is kept off-frame.

Little Sister's death also highlights the disjuncture between the traditional values that the rural immigrants still hold on to and the new, capitalist standards that are driving urban growth in China. In his dying moments, he takes the time to leave behind a list of his debts, in keeping with tradition. Jia draws attention to the list by superimposing them on a wall across the surface of the screen and holding our attention on it longer than such a seemingly minor point in the film would deem necessary. Little Sister's thoughtful accounting for his meager debts provides an ironic contrast to the out-of-control debt and expenditure cycle that is driving the rapid construction in Beijing, and to which he has fallen victim. In a gesture meant to emphasize this irony, the film cuts from the image of Little Sister's debts to the same extreme long shot of the film's title sequence. We find ourselves once again at the vista of the Beijing skyline that includes the replica of the Eiffel Tower center-frame: an image that plays with the notion that cosmopolitan cities collapse unto each other both temporally and spatially (figure 4.1). By returning to this image after Little Sister's

Figure 4.1 *The World*, Beijing/Eiffel Tower vista

tragic death, Jia makes sure to draw our attention to Beijing's superficial cosmopolitan veneer. Editing these two sequences together creates an emotional disconnect, which is further amped up when two tourists, clueless to the knowledge of Little Sister's death (and thus to the emotion that has bled into this scene), enter the frame from offscreen space in order to take a "selfie" of themselves against the postcard-like backdrop of the Beijing/Eiffel Tower vista. Throughout, the film creates this kind of dramatic—and devastating—interplay of contrasting affects. And, as with the case of *Colossal Youth*, the pain and tragic sacrifices of those who have immigrated to Beijing, in some cases even helped build it, are kept unseen.

Temporality as Mise-en-Scène

In *Colossal Youth* and *The World*, the films' melodrama arises from a disjuncture probed between lived experience, as captured on camera, and the dissonant history or histories that the bodies projected are there to represent. The relationship that each of the directors establishes between the characters and the backdrop against which they are photographed is central in producing this effect. As I noted earlier, Costa creates an environment that is almost empty, devoid of artificiality. The framings, like the surroundings, are austere. *Colossal Youth* relies predominantly on close-ups and medium shots, often also framed from a low-angle perspective, something that serves to endow Ventura in particular with a larger-than-life presence. From frame to frame, Ventura accrues iconic stature. By contrast, Jia opts mostly for long to extreme long shots, something that often dwarfs his characters in relationship to the surrounding landscape of fake, iconic structures. Jia's frames are busy, colorful, reliant on depth of field, and

bursting with an incongruous mix of cultural references—from costumes to landmarks. The visual juxtapositions in both films become a way to also access a link to history. Costa insists on making visible a body that history has made invisible by placing it center-frame, while Jia, instead, meditates on the ways in which the virtualization of landscape and body threatens to erase history altogether. In order to illustrate this, I will look closely at two moments in each of these films: the sequence at the Gulbenkian museum in *Colossal Youth* and that which takes place at the "Paris Suburb in Beijing" in *The World*. The scenes inside the Gulbenkian museum place Ventura next to art masterpieces from different eras and geographical locations around the world. Thus, the sumptuous mise-en-scène provided by the museum space and its artworks generate almost the same kind of spatial and temporal dislocation as do the scenes in *The World* with the miniatures of the World Park as backdrop.

The Gulbenkian museum's collection was once the private holdings of an Armenian immigrant, Calouste Gulbenkian, after whom the museum and the foundation that runs it take their name. The jarring overlap created by having Ventura shot against the backdrop of the museum's art pieces underscores the lopsided relationship between the city and the people who have helped build its infrastructure. The images also serve as a testament to the inequalities that underpin capitalist exploitation. The contrast that Costa silently generates between Ventura and Gulbenkian speaks to the kind of organization and distribution of global capital that has characterized the rise of globalization in the twentieth century. Gulbenkian was born in Istanbul in 1869, studied engineering in London, and became a British citizen in 1902. He was an oil magnate who, in 1911, set up the Turkish Oil Company (TOC), which later, in 1929, would become the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) and was granted exclusive rights to Iraqi oil. After Iraq was taken from the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and its oil divided up between Western countries, Gulbenkian retained 5 percent of IPC's ownership. In 1938, before the outbreak of World War II, he incorporated a company in Panama to hold his oil assets, which has now become the Partex Oil and Gas Group. The group is now comprised by what once were the Anglo-Persian Oil Co. (now BP), the Royal Dutch Shell Group, the Compagnie Française des Pétroles (now Total), and the Near East Development Company (now ExxonMobil).[40] Gulbenkian died in 1955; he was rumored to be one of the richest men in the world: "He was known among oil financiers throughout the world as 'Mr. Five Percent,' from the fact that his unaccounted millions were derived from that rate which a large share of the world's oil production earned him."[41] Ventura, for his part, personifies a very different history: an immigrant living in one of Lisbon's shantytowns, largely inhabited by Cape Verdeans who arrived to the country during the

Colonial War starting in the mid-1960s. They were employed as unskilled labor and worked in the construction industry as builders, literally lending their hands to the building of the city's infrastructure (the underground subway system, roads, ditches for electricity and telephone cables, etc.). The availability of such low-wage jobs was largely due to the migration of Portuguese unskilled labor in the 1950s and 1960s to better-paid jobs in Northern European countries. Today, fewer Cape Verdean men continue to work as builders due to the influx of Eastern European migrants in recent years.[42]

Forging a further connection between the two men is the known fact that the oil magnate spent most of his life collecting great artworks, which, according to his friends, he liked to call "my children" or "my friends." In fact, the Gulbenkian museum was erected in order to provide a home for the collection, because one of the magnate's most urgent wishes was to have his entire collection assembled under one roof. The museum's collection boasts 5,000 pieces, including six purchased between 1929 and 1930 from the Soviet Hermitage museum, and considered to be some of its greatest prizes.[43] In 1942, Gulbenkian settled in Lisbon, where eventually his collection would find a home. This anecdotal reference solidifies an ironic, but also telling, link between Ventura and the Armenian oil magnate, both immigrants to Lisbon, apparently both in need of a place large enough to house the various "children" they each collected in their lifetimes. This is a noteworthy nod that *Colossal Youth* makes toward Gulbenkian's biography, given that the only element that provides anything resembling a narrative link among the disparate scenes in *Colossal Youth* is precisely the fact that we follow Ventura as he pays visits to his nonbiological children (children born from affect rather than from capital accumulation).

The space of the museum offers a stark contrast to the other spaces in which we have seen Ventura framed, and, as Costa has described, they place Ventura on the same plane as the artworks:

> Ventura goes to the museum and we show paintings by Rubens and Rembrandt and Van Dyck. Ventura is at home there and he should be, he built the museum; it's his floor, it's his ground, his walls, his stones. He's just lucky they hung a Rubens there. Those are the kinds of meetings between famous men that I like. Like that beautiful book by Walker Evans and James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. I mean Ventura, Rubens, Rembrandt, Vanda . . . it's a beautiful thing with film, if you can abolish class and status, it's very utopian. You can still accomplish some revolutions in film, but not in life I'm afraid.[44]

By having Ventura occupy the same ontological weight and space as the artworks around him, Costa's images stake a claim for the democratizing

potential of cinema as an art form, thereby providing an idealized counterpoint to the failure of Portugal's democracy. Jacques Rancière provides a different reading of the effect of seeing Ventura against the museum's backdrop; he notes that the "museum is a place where art is locked up within this frame that yields neither transparency nor reciprocity . . . If the museum excludes the worker who built it, it is because it excludes all that lives from displacements and exchanges."[45] There are only a couple of scenes that take place at the museum, yet these are the scenes that most clearly reveal the film's allegorical investment. The fall of the utopic ideals that fueled the revolutionary fervor that led to the independence of Portugal's colonies as well as to the fall of the Estado Novo is replaced, instead, by Costa's pained idealism.

By way of how it employs its incongruous mise-en-scène to its advantage, *The World* sets up a similar temporal and spatial juxtaposition through different means. A long take early in the film, which is set against the backdrop of "Paris in Beijing," nods to a foundational moment of Western ideals of equality and freedom, one that also coincides with the origins of melodrama. Tao walks along the path that leads from the replica of the Arc de Triomphe to a scaled-down passageway meant to stand in for one of Paris' turn-of-the-century, glass-roofed arcades. The beginning of this long take thus takes us from a symbol of the French Revolution to one that stands in for a bastion of consumerism, a remark about where the ideals of freedom have ultimately led. The dialogue that ensues between Tao and Taisheng underlines this contrast. This will be the setting for the reconciliation between the two lovers, who are making up after a fight. As the camera pauses somewhere within the arcade, Taisheng enters the frame from screen left and meets Tao in the middle of the frame, with the Arc de Triomphe still framed in the background. Taisheng asks Tao how she got back to the World Park after having left his place abruptly, to which she responds, "I had plenty of choices: bus, subway, taxi," to which Taisheng retorts, "you have the freedom of choice." The banality to which the notion of freedom has been reduced as well as the sad fact that Tao actually has few, and only minor, choices available to enact any agency are both made painfully evident. The panning motion of this long take then resumes as the lovers, now reconciled and walking hand in hand, move toward an unseen space off screen right. As they move in the frame, they pass in front of a poster that depicts a man and a woman flying over Tiananmen Square on a magic carpet. The juxtaposition in the poster image turns a potent architectural symbol, with Mao's portrait firmly at its center, into the backdrop for a clichéd Orientalist fantasy. The flatness of the poster image, at the same time, makes the Tiananmen Gate equal in visual weight to the carpet and its riders, silently raising the question of

whether they each belong to the projections of fantasy. Furthermore, given the image's intimation toward magic and the invisible strings that hold such carpets up, the poster collage is a visual commentary of the government's attempt to conceal from its people what is perhaps one of the most significant events in recent Chinese history: the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy student protests and the subsequent massacre. Playing a kind of political and historical sleight of hand, the government has struck the event from official recognition.[46] As Tao and Taisheng continue to walk past the Tiananmen/carpet ride poster, the camera comes upon one of the attractions under the faux arcade: a booth that produces a DVD souvenir of park visitors on a magic carpet along the Eiffel Tower. Tao and Taisheng sit in front of a blue screen, where they hold each other and wave toward the camera. The camera continues to pan right, past the two protagonists who now remain offscreen, in order to conclude the tracking motion of this long take at the close-up of the TV screen where the animation of Taisheng and Tao on a magic carpet ride materializes (figure 4.2). The couple's bodies are dematerialized by technology right before our eyes. It is only as dematerialized consumerist/consummable images that they are able to enter the tantalizing world that otherwise is beyond their reach. The ideals of personal freedom are reduced, in a single long take, to the ability to access a virtual universe.

This single shot deploys its uninterrupted movement, lasting almost three minutes, to take us across time and territory: from the Arc de Triomphe to the digital image of the carpet ride along the Eiffel Tower, a structure built for the World's Fair in 1889 as commemoration for the centenary of the storming of the Bastille, which marks the beginning of the French Revolution. The DVD souvenir with which the long shot ends attests to the transformation of the feats of the industrial era, which the

Figure 4.2 *The World*, carpet ride

Eiffel Tower represents, into the kind of virtual technology that characterizes the information revolution of the global era. Thus, in this single panning shot, we witness a brief history of the dematerialization of reality.[47] The mélange of symbology and tourist sites that the film produces is thus not only a mark of the postmodern simulacra on which the global era thrives, given that these references and markers also attest to the uncanny reality of bodies forced to inhabit increasingly virtual landscapes that still produce materially devastating consequences.

Despite the radical difference between the mise-en-scène provided by the Gulbenkian museum in *Colossal Youth* and the attractions of the World Park in *The World*, the spatiotemporal effect is of the same order. One of the more striking scenes of Ventura in the Gulbenkian museum also makes oblique reference to the French Revolution, as Ventura sits on one of the collection's sofas belonging to the Louis XVI period (the monarch deposed and executed during the French Revolution). In this shot, Ventura serves as a measure of time outside of time, as an anachronism (time is emphasized by a clock that is lit brightly in the background; figure 4.3).

The simulacral elements of *The World*, in similar fashion, function to mark the virtualization of time: during the same long take that I have described above, just as Tao and Taisheng sit in front of the blue screen to be video-recorded, we can see a glass case containing what looks like either

Figure 4.3 *Colossal Youth*, Gulbenkian museum

books or postcards about dinosaurs. The rubric "Dinosaur World" that is written above it is a reminder that among the resurrections that characterize the digitization of the image is that of long-extinct dinosaurs—a mark of how deeply our notion of time has changed.

The image of Tao and Taisheng on the magic carpet, framed within the confines of a television screen, is the closest the couple comes to emitting a picture of happy coupledom. Not coincidentally, the magic carpet ride is also the closest they come to entering into the world of text messages that comprises the electronic, affective circuitry that connects the characters in the film. As Dudley Andrew observes,

> [i]n a daring gambit, Jia Zhang-ke inflates the brief text-messages that characters send one another into brilliantly colored full-size animation sequences, where emotions encrypted or decoded burst their tiny screens into liberating CinemaScope . . . [Jia] has inverted the norms of scale, giving us miniatures of great monuments on the one hand, and outsized reproductions of cell phone images on the other.[48]

The animated sequences that set colorized fantasies afloat always irrupt at a moment when texts are exchanged between characters; the role of melodramatic mise-en-scène in exploding an interior universe outward is thus presented literally. The imagined worlds of the characters, or, rather, the imagined depths of their exchanges, are much more vibrant than those they actually inhabit, even amid the spectacular spaces of the World Park. Gesture and affect blend in a kind of electronic netherworld.

The text messages in *The World* point toward a desire for understanding and connection that ultimately eludes its characters. In *Colossal Youth*, Lento's love letter serves a similar function. *Colossal Youth*'s love letter, which is really one that Ventura composes for Lento, is the film's connective tissue. In this case, the connections tracked are between the past and the present, or the present and that longed-for future that never arrived. If the present-day scenes of the film are connected by Ventura's wanderings as he pays visits to his various "children," the scenes from the past, which blend in indiscriminately with the scenes from the present, are marked by Ventura's reciting this love letter for Lento, who has asked him to compose it for his wife, to tell her that she is missed. *Colossal Youth*, in a sense, is itself a love letter. Costa himself first came in contact with the Fontainhas inhabitants when, after shooting *Casa de Lava* (1994) in Cape Verde, he was sent back as courier with letters for loved ones who lived in Fontainhas. This was, in effect, Costa's point of entry into Fontainhas, home to approximately 200,000 immigrant Cape Verdeans.[49] Beginning with *Casa de Lava* and followed by the Fontainhas Trilogy, Costa's films track enduring patterns of movement and migration from Cape Verde, an

island that was once completely deserted, which then became an anchor point for the slave trade in colonial times, and eventually turned into an important center for the rise of anticolonial sentiment (Amílcar Cabral, for example, was Cape Verdean). Now, its immigrant population is part of a larger community of the globally displaced. In this respect, the letter solidifies this film's allegiance to postcolonial history. As Hamid Naficy notes, "[e]xile and epistolarity are constitutively linked because both are driven by distance, separation, absence, and loss and by the desire to bridge the multiple gaps . . . the desire to be with an other and to imagine an elsewhere and other times."[50] Yet, despite the fact that it traces the trajectory of Ventura's life, the film avoids constructing a linear narrative; instead, it collapses temporality, such that colonial, postcolonial, and global temporal frames all meld onto each other. The letter thus becomes one of the means through which to express the experience of an open-ended temporality that moves forward at the same time that it only folds back upon itself.

Filtered through the narrative and temporal device of the love letter, the understanding of history and its failures (told as a failed romance) once again points to the film's deeply entrenched melodramatic roots. The love letter that Ventura composes, and which he slowly makes his own, expanding it in each retelling, is the element in the film that most profoundly communicates the sense of frustration around a future whose promised horizon has only vanished. The letter expresses a desire for a future time when the lovers will be reunited (its utopic thrust), or at the very least for when the letter's receipt is acknowledged by a return letter from the beloved. Yet, the letter is never posted, and thus it never arrives. As noted earlier, Costa has said that part of his interest in Ventura evolved from the realization that Ventura's experience of the events of 1974 was in direct contrast to his experience. Unlike the hope and exhilaration felt by the young Portuguese, black immigrants living in the slums were terrified of what this meant. In the film, this is represented by Lento merely announcing to Ventura: "Just when things are working for us this coup d'état breaks out, soldiers all over, waiting for a fight, checking IDs. They are bound to come here, don't go out for anything." Ventura replies, "I went to confession, the priest asked me if I ever ate human flesh [pause] come learn the letter." Lento, "Yesterday at dawn they passed by in a jeep. They took Yaya up into the hills. They beat him up and tied him to a pine tree. Poor guy was the first but not the last." Ventura, clutching his bandaged head, insists, "come learn the letter." Lento, "It's no use now, the letter will never reach Cape Verde." Ventura begins reciting the letter nonetheless: "meeting again will brighten our lives . . . " Lento interrupts him: "There is no more mail, Ventura. No boats, no planes, no nothing. They are all on strike." This scene reveals that the letter has been a means through which Ventura

escapes the reality in which they both live, yet, significantly, the Carnation Revolution is the event that also truncates any sustaining fantasy that could be continued to be had or shared about the future.

The scenes where we witness Ventura recite the letter take place within the space of the shack that he shared with Lento in 1974. The letter as a device that suspends linear temporality is also propped by the fact that Ventura recites it during rest time in between work shifts. The letter's repetition becomes a timekeeping device in the film, but it also underlines the status of the shack as a suspended place in time, where the men's fruitless wait for the future elapses. Ventura recites the letter, ad-libbing changes to it each time, in almost every scene that takes place between him and Lento (a total of eight times). At first, he composes it at Lento's request; later, he repeats it with the aim of helping Lento commit it to memory. In fact, much like the letter, the film itself is built on repetitive, yet slightly different, visual variations. By the seventh time that Ventura recites it, Lento remarks, "That's an awful letter, Ventura."[51]

The letter brackets a period of 30 years: roughly the temporal distance that separates the scenes in the shack from those of Ventura's wandering the slums of Lisbon. These 30 years also correspond to the temporal distance that separates the present Portuguese state from the uprising in 1974 that saw the end of the authoritarian regime that had been in power for over 40 years. And the letter's wish to continue to track a circuitry of movement between Portugal and its colonies is also an oblique way of inscribing a reference to the Estado Novo's prison camps (in the case of Cape Verde, construction workers are immigrating to Lisbon, while prisoners are being sent by António de Oliveira Salazar's regime to the camp in Tarrafal). Rancière reports that Pedro Costa wrote the letter by mixing two sources: a letter by an immigrant worker, and a letter written by the poet Robert Desnos from the Buchenwald concentration camp. The letter, thus, points to a circuit "which links the ordinary exile of workers to the death camps."[52] Only the final scene of the film between Ventura and Lento rescues the letter from its confinement to the past, where the letter returns to effect the crushing realization of all that the men have lost. Still holding hands and staring off into the distance, Lento recites the letter back to Ventura for the first time. This is an emotional moment not only because we are made aware of the fact that Lento did in fact learn the letter, but because we also recognize that the men have now arrived to that longed-for time in the future, and the future is all that much more devastating than the present in which they used to live, which is now their past (figure 4.4).

The repetition of the letter in the context of the film's conclusion provides a point of contrast between the hopefulness of the 1970s and the hopelessness of the present moment. Lento, at this point, lives in the

Figure 4.4 *Colossal Youth*, Ventura and Lento

burnt-out apartment where we have just learned that his wife and four children died. The fact that the eventual arrival of Lento's family is contained within a temporal ellipsis that leaves it outside of the film's diegesis underscores the impossibility of anything approximating the "nuclear family" ever to come together. The family remains dispersed in time and space, existing on temporal frames that never meet. This final moment between them is perhaps the most properly melodramatic moment in the film, especially for its ability to affect us. The astonishing feat that Costa's slow buildup accomplishes is that this scene shatters us emotionally, even though Costa merely keeps the camera's attention on the two men, who stand motionless, gently holding each other's hand. Their standing there, looming statuesquely in the frame, gazing off into an unknown space, is the simplest and yet most affecting of moments, one that distills the dashed hopes and staggering losses of an entire generation.

Melodrama in the global era continues to be interested in creating situations that demand recognition, yet it is no longer invested in the recognition of virtue per se. In this final scene, Lento recognizes Ventura's earlier efforts to lift their lives above the drudgery of the every day. Reciting the letter from memory proves to be a gesture of belated recognition that reveals that their connection is the only solace those 30 years into the

future would deliver. In this sense, it is a gesture that arrives both too late and in the nick of time. Hence, relying on one of the key paradigms of melodrama, the film's visual and narrative construction employs situations of belated recognition in order to relate a story of not belonging: not only in space, but also in time. *The World*, by contrast, points to the impossibility of forging enduring bonds among those migrants who have arrived in Beijing propelled by economic reasons, wooed by the glossy promise of a global cosmopolitanism to which they will likely never accede; instead, they flounder amid a landscape that further alienates them. The films' emphases on the lives of those disenfranchised by globalization push their audience to witness injustice and suffering, in a similar vein as that pursued by the films of Italian neorealism in the context of the depressed socioeconomic conditions occasioned by the war. Melodrama, as I have argued, bolsters the effort of making the injustice of the world visible. But it also does more than that. By both deploying and reorganizing melodramatic conventions around the trope of recognition and the organization of temporality, these "global neorealist" films are not only able to decry the unfair conditions of the present moment, but are also able to displace the burden of fault onto the failures of past revolutions and nation-building projects.

Conclusion: Of *Gravity* and Tears

Why insist on melodrama as a lens through which to approach global, contemporary film? What do we gain by retaining the melodramatic as a category of analysis? Sometimes the question is just plainly: why melodrama? For those of us who are invested in melodrama as a field of analysis, my experience is not uncommon; it seems that we often find ourselves backed into having to explain, sometimes with some defensiveness, why we believe it remains important, or even why it is important at all, to continue to think through the pervasiveness of the melodramatic mode and its shape-shifting capacities. As the field of film studies continues to move toward embracing the study of global cinema, either as an antidote to studies of national cinemas or as a response to the need for theorizing the pervasiveness of global media, we run into the danger of reifying similarity at the expense of historical and local specificity. This conundrum has always been at the heart of any kind of comparative analysis. I offer that melodrama provides a method through which to approach global cinema such that we can retain a kind of elastic tension to locality that does not permit our lens of analysis to wholly extricate texts that circulate globally from the national and historical contexts that inform their stylistic and narrative choices. As I have discussed, melodrama helps retain a stratified relationship to history, one that continues to be both marked on the body and narrated through it. And, most importantly, because melodrama shares an intimate relationship to the abstract ideals that made the rise of modern sovereignty possible, it continues to be particularly well equipped for visualizing its crises.

Elizabeth R. Anker has proposed that we think of melodrama not only as a film, literary, or cultural genre but also as a genre of national political discourse. She posits that American melodramatic discourse is nation-building and state-legitimating and, further, that it has been instrumental in justifying the growth of the national security state.[1] As I have argued, this is true of melodrama not just in the United States but also as a global phenomenon given that the mode develops hand in hand with

the nation-state's historical rise. Yet, given the ways in which globalization paradoxically erases certain borders while it also leads to their proliferation, it can only be true that melodrama is deployed in innovative ways such that it can still help narrate and represent how we now conceptualize time, space, and bodies. It is a telling feature of melodrama, one belatedly due for recognition, that as much as Anker has had to employ melodramatic theory in order to elaborate and make certain mechanisms of current American political discourse plainly visible, I have had to avail myself of political theory in order to make useful sense of the aesthetic and narrative parameters of melodrama in the context of a global cinema that stages anxieties around how power has been redistributed in the wake of weakening national sovereignty. Therefore, far from championing the borderless landscape that the term "global" might index, global melodramas map new temporal and spatial territories informed by the necessity to address the atomized forms of control that biopower exerts; the new arrangements and displacements of bodies that neoliberal economic policies generate; and the production of borders that works to mitigate a sense of vulnerability in an increasingly volatile world environment. Furthermore, I have argued that rather than merely providing a means through which to stage the events of the past, melodrama proves to be an adept tool with which directors rewrite, revive, and redeploy history.

As we have seen, the imagined borderlessness of globalization and the image's digitization supply melodrama with new challenges for representation. Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013) hyperbolizes this juncture. *Gravity* distills the plight of the subject in a borderless world to the extreme of imagining her as floating in a gravity-free environment. This is an almost literal rendition of the notion that a waning sovereignty brings with it "a subject made vulnerable by the loss of horizons."[2] On the one hand, the film proposes that we are left dangerously untethered in the absence of others, be it fellow astronauts or alien creatures (notably absent antagonists). On the other hand, it also reminds us that while we may be untethered from location (planet Earth), as humans we remain attached to the structures that sustain us, even when these belong to defunct nation-building, presented as space-building, projects. This is reflected in the choice of structures, all of which are ultimately destroyed: the Hubble telescope, the International Space Station, the abandoned Russian satellite, and the Chinese Tiangong station (the one in the film is actually modeled after the module that is set to launch in 2016).[3] *Gravity* presents us solely with images of Earth from space: the ultimate image of a borderless world indeed. Only in the final scene, when Dr. Stone (Sandra Bullock) lands in an uninhabited place on Earth, does the film bring us back to the real possibility of starting anew by forging new frontiers. The image of Dr. Stone

lifting herself onto her feet amid a primeval-looking landscape is an image of her triumph but also one with overtones of the need to conquer new territories, perhaps even create new borders, reinvigorating the myth of Manifest Destiny.

In Chapter 3, I argued that films like *Babel* and *The Bubble* illustrate how certain recent melodramatic narratives tap into themes about globalization only to reproduce the boundaries of the nation everywhere, thus presenting us with stories that are increasingly more devastating in their view of human connection. Here, *Gravity* enacts a clever riff on the trope of the failure of communication that permeates our globalized environment despite the advances in communication technology that have contributed to making globalization possible to begin with. The central complicating event in the film is the destruction of a Russian communications satellite by a Russian missile, which leaves the astronauts completely isolated in outer space and vulnerable to the dangerously orbiting cloud of debris left in its wake. Mission specialist Matt Kowalski (George Clooney) remarks that the missile strike must have been directed at a spy satellite gone bad, a reminder that we still live in an era marked by previous and ongoing geopolitical conflicts. His commentary is also a wry acknowledgment that the era of spying from satellites is far from over: it just demands more sophisticated technology. Eschewing the role that hostile aliens have played in much science fiction narrative, the orbiting cloud of debris is the only *deus ex machina* event that the film repeatedly employs. The flying debris also conjures a post-9/11 imaginary of an America assailed by unseen, disaggregated forces that are loosely associated to, but ultimately detached from, states and claims to sovereignty. Moreover, true to the necessities of melodramatic action, the debris makes its way around, in a timely fashion, to throw Dr. Stone into a new state of crisis and thereby move the story forward. The cloud of debris also takes out most of the communications satellites in its path, creating a cascading effect that blacks out communication on Earth. As Kowalski puts it, just before he himself disappears into the void of space, "half of North America has just lost their Facebook." And thus we are further invited to understand Dr. Stone's predicament in outer space as metaphorically emulating the existential isolation of cyberspace, made most evident when servers—or satellites—go down. *Gravity* is thus also remarkable for the ways in which it illustrates narrative cinema's dependence on melodrama for generating meaningful stories about the world we live in, even when that world is held at a distance.

Global melodrama's staging of the problems of communication and translation, for example, explicitly informs one of the film's most emotional scenes. Once Dr. Stone is disconnected from mission control in Houston, she tries desperately to connect with humanity. As Cuarón

himself describes it, when she finally does so, it happens to be with someone who speaks a different language.[4] Connecting across space in outer space still involves the melodramatic recognition of the limits of language and the reliance on the universality of pathos. Thus, despite the fact that *Gravity* centers on a character who is in the privileged position to experience the limitless expanse of the world, in actuality the narrative functions by spatially pushing her into tighter and tighter, and increasingly more limited, compartments. Not unlike in the case of *Babel*, as the world around Dr. Stone is set on fire or destructs amid collisions and explosions, she must retreat into cocoon-like enclosures to ensure her survival. In essence, the absence of borders once again prompts an increased necessity for enclosures.

The narrative effectiveness of Dr. Stone's physical plight for survival under uninhabitable conditions, the action component of this melodrama, is supported by the emotional backstory that lends her plight metaphorical weight, the pathos element of the story. As we have seen, it is one of melodrama's requirements that a repressed, or otherwise unprocessed, event has occurred outside the film's diegetic frame; the narrative we witness must in some way cope with it. In this film, we are invited to read Dr. Stone's isolation in space as a self-imposed, emotional exile. We learn of the death of her four-year-old daughter, which becomes the foundational, non-diegetic loss that animates this melodramatic narrative. Incapable of dealing with the loss, Dr. Stone finds herself drifting in the void of absolute loneliness, as far away from Earth as she is from other human beings. From the moment that Dr. Stone must detach from the mechanical arm that anchored her to the now-destroyed Hubble telescope, the film signals that "letting go" is its guiding parable and, therefore, Dr. Stone's only recourse to survival and subsequent renewal. This being so, only moments later, she has to also let go of Kowalski, the only other survivor left in space. Now alone in outer space, which is also the inner space of her turmoil and mourning, she has to reclaim her desire to live.

Gravity is perhaps the beginning of a new trend in space exploration films, given that *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014) is also a parental melodrama dressed up as a space film. If *Gravity*, with its female protagonist, is a drama about space, then *Interstellar*, a drama about time, ascribes to a similar essentialist logic in its choice to focus on a male protagonist. It is true that the real hero of the film turns out to be the protagonist's daughter, Murph (played sequentially by Mackenzie Foy, Jessica Chastain, and Ellen Burstyn), but, throughout the film, she remains caught in linear time and in a single geographical locale. Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) has traveled in space to save the world, one that is almost exclusively represented as a large cornfield of the American Midwest. He embarks on his

mission at the great sacrifice of aging slower than his beloved daughter. Cooper has promised Murph that he will be back at a moment when they are the same age. This sets in motion the film's fundamental melodramatic temporal structure: Cooper is going to arrive either "too late" or "in the nick of time." He in fact arrives too late, very late, but he thus gives Murph ample time (her entire lifetime, it turns out) to save the world herself. The film aims to be a visual and philosophical rendition of time's relativity, yet, only bolstering Linda Williams' argument that at the core of melodrama is the wish to recuperate time, the film ultimately turns the loss of time into the fundamental source of its pathos. The time lost between father and daughter elicits an ample stream of tears from both the on-screen protagonists and the film's audience. Time may be relative, but the film can only move forward by imagining it as irrecoverable.

Instead of computer-generated images of the universe, *Gravity* presents us with real images of Earth captured by the Hubble telescope. It is as if the film expressly aimed to upstage the awe that the increasingly lifelike quality of virtual images occasions by restoring, instead, our wonder at the world itself. Yet, in an interesting turn, despite the fact that the film showcases magnificent images captured by the Hubble telescope, it also fictionally stages the Hubble's destruction. And thus, though the film is predicated on Dr. Stone's mourning of a past event, its image track seems to want to elicit our mourning for a demise yet to come, perhaps that of Earth as a life-sustaining place. Kowalski's last words before disappearing into the void of space are in effect those of a witness watching a world vanish: "you should see the sun on the Ganges, it's amazing." *Interstellar* is literally predicated on this apocalyptic imaginary. During the course of Cooper's travails in space, Earth in fact becomes uninhabitable. When he is finally rescued and brought to see Murph, who is now dying of old age, he is brought back "home" not to Earth but to a replica of where he used to live: an orbiting colony of corn growers and NASA specialists. This is all that is left of humanity, which is now forced to subsist in space with the hope of colonizing a new planet.

If I am drawn to these films about space as a mode of conclusion, it is because they so clearly illustrate the pervasiveness and endurance of melodrama, while they also point to how it finds itself in the midst of renewal amid our changing conceptions of temporality, the limits that bounded space once represented, and a virtual transformation that challenges our connection to images of reality and therefore to the past. It is true that other approaches to the study of global cinema may highlight and make visible the complex ways in which global capital circulates, a reality that has also transformed the globe and that underpins our current geopolitical moment. In fact, a mode of filmmaking presently on the

rise falls under the rubric of "slow cinema," a contemplative mode that, through different parameters, also reorganizes our affective relationship to time and space. Slow cinema works against the speeded-up logistics of global capital (and blockbuster films), providing another measure for our experience of the world. Pedro Costa's and Jia Zhangke's films more evidently belong to this category of filmmaking, for example. Nonetheless, I have demonstrated how melodrama, far from remaining politically and aesthetically irrelevant or reactionary, makes visible mechanisms that may otherwise remain occluded to other frames of analysis.

Stanley Cavell reminds us, "issues in melodrama tend to be laid on with trowels: caring for them depends on whether you care about matters that demand that openness or extravagance of care."[5] Much like Kowalski's admonition that we remember to look out at a beautiful world that is still out there—outside of our insularity and the virtual worlds that have captured our attentions—melodrama asks that we remain invested in finding meaning in the world that still tethers our longings, our loves, and our imagination. More work remains to be done in order to elucidate the ways in which melodrama allows for the contested and redistributed character of sovereignty to come into view and thus to outline the new cartographies of intimate universes made possible by transformed spatiotemporal, political, and affective landscapes.

Notes

Introduction: Global Melodrama

1. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 2006): 29.
2. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).
3. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, eds. *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen* (London: BFI, 1994): 1.
4. Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990).
5. Works such as Frederic Jameson's *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and Simon During's "Popular Culture on a Global Scale: A Challenge for Cultural Studies?," *Critical Inquiry* 23.4 (1997): 808–833, are some of the first examples of cultural critics taking up the question of how film narratives shift in order to address the changes brought about by the new world system.
6. See Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson, *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007) and Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar, *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
7. Laura Mulvey, " 'It Will Be a Magnificent Obsession': The Melodrama's Role in the Development of Contemporary Film Theory," in *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*, 121–133.
8. Take, for example, Barbara Klinger's work on the films of Douglas Sirk. *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). Or other directors not working in Hollywood, some influenced by Sirk, who have prompted such analyses: Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Pedro Almodóvar, Atom Egoyan, and Lars von Trier, to name a few. The films of David Lynch could be said to continue this tradition within the American industry. Todd Haynes famously adapted three of Sirk's films for his 2002 homage to the director, *Far from Heaven*.
9. See Nick Browne, "Griffith's Family Discourse: Griffith and Freud," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI Publishing, 1987): 223–234.

10. Steave Neale, "Melo Talk: On the Meaning and Use of the Term 'Melodrama' in the American Trade Press," *Velvet Light Trap* 32 (Fall), 66–89.
11. Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 42–48.
12. Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, eds. *Global Art Cinema: New Theories and Histories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 10.
13. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983): 19. Also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000): 95.
14. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 15.
15. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 44. See also the essays collected in *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*.
16. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 101.
17. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is*.
18. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xi. For them, though, sovereignty has shifted its domain to what they call "Empire": it is now composed of "a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule" (xiii). "Empire" is in turn unlike imperialism in that "it establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers" (xii).
19. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
20. See, in particular, the introduction to *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*, 1–8. It states: "[melodrama] becomes the form both to register change and to process change, in particular mediating relations between a lost but problematic past and the present" (3). And the links between melodrama and revolution: Peter Brooks, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," in *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*, 11–24, and Daniel Gerould, "Melodrama and Revolution," in *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*, 185–198.
21. Williams adapts this statement, which she attributes to Henry James, who was describing Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. See Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card*: *Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001): 6, 12–13.
22. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 1. On the development of what Brooks calls melodrama's "aesthetics of muteness" and its derivation from the pantomime form, see also pp. 62–68.
23. Brooks, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*, 11–24.
24. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995): 13. On the link between the introduction of the guillotine, revolutionary ideals, and melodrama, an interesting film to ponder is Patrice Leconte's *The Widow of Saint-Pierre* (2000).
25. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 25.

26. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, xi.
27. This is something Brooks himself acknowledges in "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," 12.
28. Michel Foucault's "La naissance de la medicine sociale" in *Dits et écrits*, cited in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 27.
29. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," 1.
30. Bhabha, "Introduction," 4.
31. Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 10.
32. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 3.
33. Williams, *Playing the Race Card*, 23. Here, Williams refers specifically to the US context, but this is also true of melodrama as a global mode.
34. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 47.
35. Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold Publishers, 2000): 226.
36. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 70.
37. Bhaskar Sarkar, "Melodramas of Globalization," *Cultural Dynamics* 20.1 (2008): 31–51.
38. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 1.
39. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 2.
40. Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), in particular chapter 3, "Sensationalism and Urban Modernity," 59–99.

    > [T]echnology was at [melodrama's] core, both on stage and behind the scenes. On stage, sensation scenes showcased the latest marvels of the machine age, its mise-en-scène rendering (or whenever possible presenting in actuality) every conceivable emblem of the industrial era: locomotives, steamships, fire engines, submarines, automobiles, motorboats, subways, hot-air balloons, motorcycles, suspension bridges, steam hammers, pile drivers, spinning machines, etc. (12)

41. On digital special effects and a new verticality that has become an important feature in contemporary film, including an analysis of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, see Kristen Whissel, "Tales of Upward Mobility," *Film Quarterly* 59.4 (Summer 2006): 23–34.
42. See Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in an Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
43. Brooks, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," 13.
44. See Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
45. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 70.
46. See Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State?* (New York: Seagull Books, 2007). Butler is thinking together statelessness from an

American context: post-9–11 detention in Guantanamo, the displaced of Afghanistan/Iraq wars, and, even more centrally, the politicization of immigration rights in the United States—from where the title of the essay comes.

47. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*.

Chapter 1

1. Though this is true stylistically speaking, it is not necessarily true thematically. Despina Kakoudaki has noted that the comparison to Sirk should be qualified, a point with which I agree: "In contrast to directors such as Douglas Sirk, who may use melodrama to produce distantiation or estrangement, Almodóvar's melodramatic style often has the opposite result, a kind of enfolding of characters, audience, and even critics into a familiar circle of shared references and experiences" (221). See "Intimate Strangers: Melodrama and Coincidence in *Talk to Her*," in *All about Almodóvar: A Passion for Cinema*, eds. Brad Epps and Despina Kakoudaki (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 193–238.
2. In keeping with Almodóvar's interest in citing and reviving a tradition of classical Hollywood film, it would be useful to trace a genealogy of these films back to the women's films of the 1940s that dealt with, as Mary Ann Doane has described, a "clinical discourse." See the chapter "Clinical Eyes: The Medical Discourse," in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987): 38–69.
3. Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (Volume I) (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 142–143.
4. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, eds. *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen* (London: BFI, 1994): 7.
5. One of the earliest collections of essays to establish this line of inquiry was Kathleen M. Vernon and Barbara Morris, eds. *Post-Franco, Postmodern: The Films of Pedro Almodóvar* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995). Also Marsha Kinder's analysis of Almodóvar's films in *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
6. The first of his films to explicitly address Spain's current economic crisis is the recent *I'm So Excited!* (*Los amantes pasajeros*, 2013).
7. Epps and Kakoudaki, *All about Almodóvar*, 2.
8. Press junket interviews for *The Skin I Live In*, New York City, October 2011. Almodóvar indicated that he worked on the script of *The Skin I Live In* for a decade, which means he started working on the idea for this script around 2001.
9. Officially "Law 52/2007," passed on December 26, 2007, by Zapatero's Partido Socialista Obrero Español/Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) government. The Historical Memory Law represents the culmination, even if at the same time it also only marks a beginning, of the efforts brought by

the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH), which was founded in 2000.

10. For an analysis of this trope in *Volver*, see Steven Marsh, "Missing a Beat: Syncopated Rhythms and Subterranean Subjects in the Spectral Economy of *Volver*," in *All about Almodóvar*, 339–356.
11. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991): 6.
12. I have further analyzed the implications of Vera's perfect, burn-resistant in the context of biopolitics but also film's digital transformation in "Cinema, Transgenesis, and History in *The Skin I Live In*," *Social Text* 122 (2015): 49–70.
13. See, as just some examples, Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004); Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (New York: Picador, 2008).
14. Here, one might also consider the centrality more recently ascribed to the concept of immunity in historical and/or philosophical accounts of the sociopolitical constitution of the modern body and the work of establishing (a national) community. See Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Roberto Esposito, "Community, Immunity, Biopolitics," trans. Zakiya Hanafi, in *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 18.3 (2013): 83–90.
15. See Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending*.
16. The film ends shorty after an intertitle reading "Marco and Alicia" comes on screen. This is exactly the same cinematic gesture that introduces, at separate points, the stories of "Marco and Lydia."
17. Because Vicente's forced sex reassignment complicates the issue of his transsexual embodiment, I will refrain from using a single gendered pronoun to refer to this character. Accordingly, I address Vera as "she," and Vicente as "he."
18. An even more subtle, and perhaps just a coincidental, connection is the fact that Elena Anaya who plays Vera had previously only once before appeared in an Almodóvar film as Marco's ex-girlfriend in *Talk to Her*.
19. On melodrama as "pressuring" the visual field for meaning, see Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).
20. Additionally, the mannequin on the operating table where Dr. Ledgard tests his artificial skin echoes the mannequin used in the silent film segment of *Talk to Her* (for "The Shrinking Lover")—a visual cue that further forges a link between these two films. The violence that Ledgard perpetrates on Vicente has direct resonances, then, to the film within the film used to cover over Benigno's rape.
21. Here, I echo a construction that Stanley Cavell uses in relation to the women of classical Hollywood melodrama, particularly Bette Davis in *Now, Voyager*, especially given her penchant toward theatricality: "She is and is not what she

is. Here is the pivotal irony in this member [*Now, Voyager*] of a genre of irony. It is true that she *is* the fat lady, not merely was true when she was in fact fat. And it is false that she is the fat lady, and *was* false when she was in fact fat, because she was always, for example, an ugly duckling, that is, unrecognized" (134, emphases in original). I would claim that *Talk to Her* and *The Skin I Live In* are films that share the generic and philosophical bent that Cavell has coined and delimited as the "unknown woman" melodrama (in the case of *Talk to Her*, I would claim Benigno rather than Alicia fits this mold, or at the very least that the characters are meant to embody opposite sides of the same coin). This not a claim that I can develop here beyond noting that echoes of Cavell's formulation are relevant to Almodóvar's work. Part of the link, or the inheritance played out in Almodóvar's films from this period of the Hollywood melodrama, has to do with Cavell's sense that the women of such melodramas judge the world as second-rate (127). In that judgment, the demand and possibility for a world that would actually accommodate their desire is opened and declared. At the end of *Talk to Her*, Alicia meets Marco, a man well acquainted with her history and the realm of sadness, while Vicente-as-Vera at the end of *The Skin I Live In*, for all the harrowing violence he has had to endure, just might get the girl he had desired by film's end (Cristina, a lesbian, who had earlier rejected his advances). See Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

22. Almodóvar's conception of the body, in this respect, has clear resonances to a line of thinking about the body that can be traced back to Michel Foucault's work.
23. Agamben cites the redefinition of the comatose state after the advent of life support technology in the 1960s as an example for how the distinction between life and death blurred, not only in medical terms but also in legal ones. He also notes how the necessity to classify comatose patients was informed by the fact that they were the ideal patients for the harvesting of transplant organs right at the time when the technology was being developed and refined. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*: *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): 160–165.
24. Marsha Kinder, "Reinventing the Motherland: Almodóvar's Brain-Dead Trilogy," *Film Quarterly* 58.2 (Winter 2004): 11.
25. Kinder, "Reinventing the Motherland," 9–25.
26. Kinder, "Reinventing the Motherland," 16.
27. Kinder, "Reinventing the Motherland," 14.
28. Kinder, "Reinventing the Motherland," 22–23.
29. The medical technology of cloning, a merely fictional inscription in *Labyrinth of Passion*, is a reality in the context of the cloned skin of *The Skin I Live In*. Scientists in Spain, in fact, were the first to successfully clone human skin in 2009, two years before the release of Almodóvar's film. The doctor who succeeds at the asexual reproduction of parakeets in *Labyrinth of Passion* ironically harbors a phobia of sex itself. The patriarchal figure, from the beginning of Almodóvar's career, is thus marked as flawed, no longer the potent figure representative of a Francoist Spain; he is instead presented as a failed personage.

It is not a minor detail that the cloned parakeets have a defect: they do not have the ability to sing. The parakeets, almost comedically, are mute figures that speak to the inability of power to faithfully reproduce the forms it wishes to govern. In other words, when placed face to face with the biological reality of organisms, be it parakeets or people, something slips away from power's control: herein lies the ultimate significance of the body as that which power must govern, and that which can subvert a government's power. Again, *The Skin I Live In* bookends this trope nicely, as Vicente—now as Vera—escapes the grasp of the mad doctor who "produced" her, having stitched onto her body a cloned skin made specifically for her. Ledgard, a patriarchal figure who represents absolute power, is ultimately felled by the very being he had not only aimed to control (and punish), but whose identity he strove to forge.

30. Other examples of medical settings that have appeared in Almodóvar's films: the dentist office in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984); the insane asylum from which Lucía is discharged in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988); the hospital to which Becky is taken following her heart attack at the end of *High Heels*; another insane asylum from which a character escapes in the case of the minor character Paul Basso in *Kika* (1993); or also in the case of the lead of *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1989), Antonio, who finally "gets the girl" once he is beat up on the streets and, taking pity on him, she tends to his wounds as he had already nurtured her toothache (the scenes do not occur at hospitals, but the trope of healing the body is nonetheless central); in *All about My Mother*, the third Esteban is born at the hospital where his mother, Sister Rosa, also dies, which like *The Flower of My Secret*, as discussed by Kinder, opens at a hospital; *Live Flesh*/*Carne trémula* (1997) does not have a scene explicitly occurring at a hospital, but we do see photographs of Victor with his mother on a hospital bed (we first see her give birth on a bus). *Volver* and *Broken Embraces* also have scenes in hospitals: Raimunda visits Agustina after her cancer surgery in the former, while Lena is rushed to the hospital with broken bones in the latter. Also, in Lena's case, her fate with Ernesto Martel is sealed at the moment when he helps with her father's medical care.
31. See Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 61.
32. I have analyzed this aspect of the film in greater depth in "The Transvestite Figure and Film Noir: Almodóvar's Transnational Imaginary," *Contemporary Spanish Cinema and Genre*, eds. Jay Beck and Vicente Rodríguez Ortega (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008): 157–178.
33. See, for example, the collected special reports in "Vidas robadas" ("Stolen Lives") in *El País* (the stories have multiple publication dates: they start in November 2008, with the bulk of the publications from 2011), accessed October 28, 2011, at http://www.elpais.com/especial/vidas-robadas/.
34. See Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI Publishing, 1987), 32; and Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 70.

35. As Kakoudaki has noted, the editing structure of this scene supports the reading that though she does not know him, she perhaps vaguely remembers him. "Intimate Strangers," 196.
36. Kakoudaki, "Intimate Strangers," 200.
37. Kakoudaki, "Intimate Strangers,"196.
38. Kakoudaki, "Intimate Strangers," 234.
39. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 26, 53.
40. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
41. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24–25.
42. See, in particular, Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998) who, expanding Anderson's concept, claims that "the work of the imagination [is] a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (3).
43. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 3.
44. Along with Kakoudaki's sense of the defining significance of this trope in Almodóvar's work, Agustín Zarzosa identifies coincidence as a central characteristic of the melodramatic mode. See *Refiguring Melodrama in Film and Television*: *Captive Affects, Elastic Sufferings, Vicarious Objects* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013).
45. Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008): 52.
46. Wald, *Contagious*, 52.
47. Wald, *Contagious*, 33.
48. Wald, *Contagious*, 37.
49. Wald, *Contagious*, 54.
50. Wald, *Contagious*, 10.
51. Wald, *Contagious*, 22.
52. Wald, *Contagious*, 160. Here, Wald refers specifically to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956) and how the protagonist experiences how those familiar undergo a terrifying estrangement.
53. See Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*; Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field"; and Williams, "Melodrama Revised."
54. Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 29.
55. On Alicia as sleeping beauty, see Adriana Novoa, "Whose Talk Is It? Almodóvar and the Fairy Tale in *Talk to Her*," *Marvels and Tales* 19.2 (2005): 224–248.
56. The first instance of the "Sleeping Beauty" myth is considered to be Giambattista Basile's story "Sun, Moon, and Talia," which first appeared in 1634 (http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/type0410.html#contents). Almodóvar's retelling of the sleeping beauty myth acknowledges the element that has been repressed from the modern retelling of the original story: in Basile's rendition, the princess is awakened by a rape.
57. Kakoudaki, "Intimate Strangers," 213.
58. On prosthetic memory's capacity to activate empathy for the historical experience of others, see Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

59. Novoa, "Whose Talk Is It?," 238.
60. See Kakoudaki, "Intimate Strangers;" Kinder, "Reinventing the Motherland;" and Novoa, "Whose Talk Is It?"; also, Kevin Ohi, "Voyeurism and Annunciation in Almodóvar's *Talk to Her*," *Criticism* 51.4 (Fall 2010): 521–557; Mark Allinson, "Mimeses and Diegisis: Almodóvar and the Limits of Melodrama," *All about Almodóvar*, 141–165; and Carla Marcantonio, "Undoing Performance: The Mute Female Body and Narrative Dispossession in Pedro Almodóvar's *Talk to Her*," *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 17.1 (2007): 1–18.
61. Siegfried Kracauer, in particular, in his influential work, *From Caligari to Hitler*, is responsible not only for this reading of the film and the time period but also for being one of the first film critics to demonstrate the ways in which film can reflect unacknowledged undercurrents in the national imaginary. See *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), Revised and Expanded.
62. Pina Bausch was a student and later a collaborator of Kurt Jooss.
63. At the same time, in a manner that also resonates with the ethos of Almodóvar's films, which consistently refuse a nihilistic view of the world, *The Incredible Shrinking Man* insists upon viewing the limits of an ordinary world, marked by war and destruction, from an extraordinary perspective that dwells on the universality of being. Its closing existential monologue appeals to a world yet to come. The following monologue is delivered via voice-over, as the film's small protagonist emerges from behind a screen, which from his diminished vantage point looks like a prison, onto a natural landscape, as he gazes up at the sky:

    > I was continuing to shrink, to become, what? The infinitesimal. What was I? Still a human being? Or was I the man of the future? If there were other bursts of radiation, other clouds drifting across seas and continents, would other beings follow me into this vast, new world? So close, the infinitesimal and the infinite. But suddenly I knew they were the two ends of the same concept, the unbelievably small and the unbelievably vast eventually meet, like the closing of a gigantic circle. I looked up, as if somehow I would grasp the heavens. The universe, worlds beyond number. God's silver tapestry spread across the night. And in that moment I knew the answer to the riddle of the infinite. I had thought in terms of man's limited dimension, I had presumed upon nature: that existence begins and ends is man's conception, not nature's. And I felt my body dwindling, melting, becoming nothing. My fears melted away and in their place came acceptance. All this vast majesty of creation, it had to mean something, and then I meant something too. Yes, smallest of the smallest, I meant something too. To God there is no zero. I still exist!

64. Brooks continues, "[i]t may be a strange comment on the enduring charisma of the anointed body of the king, that, even inanimate, it had to be destroyed, effaced, reduced to nothingness" ("Melodrama, Body, Revolution," 13).
65. Brooks, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," 17.

66. Brooks, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," 18.
67. Brooks, "Melodrama, Body, Revolution," 11.
68. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.
69. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 7.
70. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.
71. Vicente's predicament bares close echoes to the concerns of a YouTube video that Almodóvar released shortly after the film's own release as a mode of protest against Judge Baltasar Garzón's disbarment. Garzón had opened an investigation into human rights abuses perpetrated under the Franco regime. The personalities that appear in the video in his support repeat the incantation "I had no trial, no lawyer, no sentence, [members of my family] continue to search for me. Until when?" See "Almodóvar x Garzón," released on February 14, 2012, accessed February 17, 2012, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpkGjunMkVo.
72. In this film, story upon story of family trauma is overlaid onto the other; Marilia, the housekeeper, gave birth to two half-brothers: one is the son of her wealthy employer (Robert Ledgard) and the second is the son of the hired help (Zeca). Zeca knows Marilia to be his mother, but Robert, who continues to employ her as a maid, does not; Robert's wife, Gal, was burned in a car as she attempted to run away with Zeca (with whom she was having an affair); Gal survives the severe burns all over her body only to jump out of a window at the sight of her reflection in a mirror; Robert and Gal's daughter, Norma, who witnesses her mother's death, is later raped by Vicente, and she, too, after being institutionalized in a psychiatric ward, commits suicide. These are only the subplots of the film; the primary narrative line, as we have seen, involves Vicente being abducted and turned into Vera, only to then be raped by Zeca as a precondition to her freedom (from this point on, Ledgard no longer keeps her locked up and she works to gain his trust, which she will betray).
73. In analyzing the role of Latin American ballads in Almodóvar's films, Kathleen M. Vernon has argued that "song serves the cause of cultural mobility while freezing the advance of the narrative and inviting us to contemplate the transactions between geographic, artistic, sexual, and affective registers and identities" (54). See "Queer Sound: Musical Otherness in Three Films by Pedro Almodóvar," in *All about Almodóvar*.
74. On the Spanish achievement, see http://biotic.ugr.es/pages/tablon/*/noticias-cientificas/2009/12/04/cientificos-espaaoles-logran-generar-una-piel-humana-artificial-con-optimas-propiedades-biomecanicas-mediante-ingenieria-tisular, accessed March 19, 2012. Furthermore, the presence of "Brazilians" in the film serves a reminder of the high influx of Latin American immigrants to Spain in recent years. And, not irrelevant in the case of this film, this migration also encompasses a notable percentage of Brazilian transsexuals who emigrate to Europe with dreams to make money, transition, and return home—quests that often end badly (I thank Denise Ferreira da Silva for this observation).
75. "Interview: Pedro Almodóvar' accessed February 1, 2013, at http://www.avclub.com/articles/pedro-,63762/.

76. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, in *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 20.
77. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 21.
78. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 23.
79. Kakoudaki, "Intimate Strangers," 212.
80. For an overview of how this issue has reemerged in the face of Spain's first attempt to employ a transitional measure that addresses the crimes against humanity committed during Franco's regime, see Peter Burbidge, "Waking the Dead of the Spanish Civil War: Judge Baltasar Garzón and the Spanish Law of Historical Memory," *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 9 (2011): 753–781.

Chapter 2

1. On the films as nostalgic, see Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2005): 1–19.
2. Article 5, see "Basic Law," at http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/basiclawtext/chapter_1.html.
3. On the subject of unity as a trope driving Wong Kar-wai's films, see Rey Chow's analysis of *Happy Together* (1997), in *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).
4. The last intertitle in the film once again presents the recurring date of Christmas, which we have seen in earlier intertitles. At the end of the film, the intertitle tells us that it is 1969. Yet, the 1969 encounter in Singapore, we are told, occurred "last Christmas," which means that the last Christmas we see in the film actually takes place in 1970.
5. Bai Ling's and Chow Mo-wan's relationship is rendered in economic terms that underline Hong Kong's own status as both banking place and bartered territory.
6. My use of "no-time" here is distinct from Todd McGowan's claim that *2046* sets apart eternity as a rupture within history. My use of the term "no-time" is, instead, a way to account for an overlapping of time, a simultaneity that occurs transversally across historical time periods. See Todd McGowan, *Out of Time: Desire in Atemporal Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): 157–180.
7. China refers to this date not as "the handover" but, tellingly, as the "reunification."
8. Jean Ma, *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010): 136–137 (citing Ackbar Abbas).
9. Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 138.
10. Unlike the majority of critics who see *In the Mood for Love* and *2046* as being part of a trilogy that includes *Days of Being Wild/Ah fei zing zyun* (1990), the only other film of Wong to be set in the 1960s, I take *Happy Together* to be part of a trilogy of geographic and temporal "exile."

11. See Ackbar Abbas' discussion on *Chungking Express* in *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
12. Though *2046* begins in 1966, the first segment between Mr. Chow and the second Su Li-zhen takes place in 1963. This is a time, Chow announces, via voice-over, when "my life had lost most of its meaning."
13. She first appears on screen as one of the androids of the futuristic sequences; the second time she is held on screen briefly in a shot that resonates with the style and manner in which her visit to Singapore, at the end of *In the Mood for Love*, had been shot; she then appears one last time, during one of the three black-and-white cab ride sequences, sitting next to Chow.
14. The way in which the characters put together "clues" has lead Stephen Teo to claim that the film functions in the detective mode. See *Wong Kar-wai: Auteur of Time* (London: BFI, 2008).
15. McGowan, *Out of Time*, 161.
16. Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 127.
17. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 42–88.
18. Marcia Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996),: 161.
19. See Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley, eds. *The Postcolonial and the Global* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
20. Gina Marchetti, "Buying American, Consuming Hong Kong: Cultural Commerce, Fantasies of Identity and the Cinema," in *The Cinema of Hong Kong: History, Arts, Identity*, eds. Poshek Fu and David Desser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 289–313.
21. Ma, *Melancholy Drift*, 133.
22. At the end of *2046*, when this scene of departure, like an echo, plays out a second time, we learn something we had not been made privy to the first time: that the reason her makeup is smudged is because he had kissed her. Again in voice-over, he explains, "I was looking for what I'd felt with the other Su Li-zhen."
23. Jacqui Sadashige, "*In the Mood for Love*" (review), *American Historical Review* (October 2001): 1513–1514.
24. Sadashige, "*In the Mood for Love*," 1514.
25. Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*.
26. The already elliptical temporal framework of the film is accentuated in the sequences at the hotel room. The film's jump-cut editing style is most evident in those sequences showing Cheung's interrupted climb and descent of the hotel's stairway. The production information comes from the commentary in the Criterion Collection DVD release of *In the Mood for Love*.
27. In fact, the Spanish name for the Malvinas Islands takes its name from the French, Îles Malouines.

28. Yet, as Michael Hayes and Imran Vittachi note in an article that commemorates the 30th anniversary of de Gaulle's speech in 1996 (the anniversary coincides with the time during which *Happy Together* was under production),

> Ten days after his presidential DC-8 carried him away from the turbulent Indochinese peninsula to the tranquil reaches of the South Pacific, De Gaulle—who in Phnom Penh had clamored for peoples' right to their national self-determination—is pictured on the bridge of a French Navy frigate. There he is, his leonine profile fixed on the horizon as a French nuclear test rips through the skies over Mururoa.

See "De Gaulle's Famous 1966 Speech Remembered," *Phnom Penh Post* (September 6, 1966).

29. The strategy that Wong employs when he turns the footage into a kind of "haunting image" bears similarities with those of the "ghost film" that Bliss Cua Lim has described as resurrecting striated temporalities in Asian cinema. See her chapter "Spectral Time, Heterogeneous Space: The Ghost Film as Historical Allegory," in *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).
30. Maynard Parker, "Reports: Hong Kong," *Atlantic Monthly* 220.5 (Hong Kong, November 1967): 14–28.
31. See Lawrence Cheuk-yin Wong, "The 1967 Riots: A Legitimacy Crisis?," in *May Days in Hong Kong: Riot and Emergency in 1967*, eds. Robert Bickers and Ray Yep (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009): 37–52.
32. Robert Bickers and Ray Yep, eds. *May Days in Hong Kong: Riot and Emergency in 1967* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).
33. Tomasulo, " 'I'll See It When I Believe It': Rodney King and the Prison House of Video," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996): 70.
34. Tomasulo, " 'I'll See It When I Believe It,' " 71 (emphasis in original).
35. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
36. Hayden White, "The Modernist Event," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996).
37. White, "The Modernist Event," 29.
38. Robert Burgoyne, "Modernism and the Narrative of Nation in JFK," in *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996): 114.
39. Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011): xxvii; Also on contingency and cinematic time, Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
40. See *Anatomy of Memories* short documentary segment for the *2046* DVD (Sony Pictures Classics).

41. Examples of these films are *Red Sorghum* (1987), *Ju Dou* (1990), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), *The Story of Qiu Ju* (1992), *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), *To Live* (1994), and *Temptress Moon* (1996). She is also used as a symbolic embodiment of China next to Jeremy Irons in a film about Hong Kong's 1997 handover, Wayne Wang's *Chinese Box* (1997).
42. Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), Kindle Edition, loc. 246, 1305.
43. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, Kindle Edition, loc. 1305.
44. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, Kindle Edition, loc. 611.
45. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, Kindle Edition, loc. 680.
46. Rosenstone, *History on Film*, Kindle Edition, loc. 680.
47. Cook, *Screening the Past*, 17 (footnote 2). Cook observes that there are around 22 different dresses, some of them worn more than once. Zhang Ziyi in *2046* as an echo of Maggie Cheung also changes dress innumerable times throughout the course of the film. At one point, to underline that the women are meant to be echoes of each other, Maggie Cheung appears in a cameo wearing one of the dresses we have already seen Zhang Ziyi wear.
48. Cook, *Screening the Past*, 10.
49. Hiufu Wong, "Sexy, Skintight, Sophisticated: How China's Iconic Dress Has Survived a Century," March 20, 2014, accessed June 14, 2014, at http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/26/travel/cheongsam-exhibition-hk/.
50. Wong, "Sexy, Skintight, Sophisticated."
51. Wong, "Sexy, Skintight, Sophisticated."
52. Hiufu Wong's article notes that "Inspiration still crosses over to Western runways cheongsam designs have been included in a 2011 Ralph Lauren collection, a 2012 Gucci collection and Emilio Pucci's 2013 spring/summer collection."
53. Marcia Landy, "Introduction," in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000): 6. Note that here she is referencing the work of Antonio Gramsci.
54. Landy, "Introduction," 9.
55. Landy, "Introduction," 7.
56. White, "The Modernist Event," 19.
57. Steve Neale, "Melodrama and Tears," *Screen* 27.6 (1986): 6–23.
58. Williams, "Melodrama Revised."
59. Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 69.
60. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Shocken Books, 1968): 255.
61. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.
62. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 255.

Chapter 3

1. See Doris Sommer, "Irresistible Romance: The Foundational Fictions of Latin America," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990): 71–98.

2. In my analysis of *Babel*, I will foreground the editing's role in reifying a distinction between backward versus modern spaces, in a way that also metaphorically recreates the border in between the disparate geographical locations it "hops" across. For an analysis of the film's editing in relationship to politicized subjectivity and its dependence on contingency, see Todd McGowan, "The Contingency of Connection: The Path to Politicization in *Babel*," *Discourse* 30.3 (2008): 401–418. For *Babel* as an example of "disordered cinema" and "globalized puzzle," see Marina Hassapopoulou, "*Babel*: Pushing and Reaffirming Mainstream Cinema's Boundaries," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 50 (2008), source: ejumpcut.org, accessed April 15, 2012.
3. Other taglines include "Tragedy is universal"; "A global disaster"; "One shot, many kills"; and "Listen" (source: IMDb.com).
4. Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Aine O'Healy, "Introduction: Mapping Transnational Feminist Media Studies," in *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media Studies*, eds. Katarzyna Marciniak, et al. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 2.
5. Rebecca L. Stein, "Explosive: Scenes from Israel's Gay Occupation," *GLQ: Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.4 (2010): 528–529.
6. See Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak, *Who Sings the Nation State?* (New York: Seagull Books, 2007). Butler analyzes statelessness from an American context. She discusses the post-9/11 detentions in Guantanamo, the displaced of Afghanistan/Iraq wars, and the politicization of immigration rights in the United States—the title of the book refers to the latter.
7. Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2012): 108.
8. Butler does not so much state this as allude to this connection when she notes a similarity between Guantanamo and Gaza, noting that in Guantanamo, "there is no state (though delegated state power controls and terrorizes the territory where its inhabitants live)" (*Who Sings*, 7). Butler suggests that Israeli modes of containment provide the model for the modes of detention that characterize post-9/11 geopolitics. And yet later she says it more explicitly, in how she understands Hanna Arendt, "[t]he problem of statelessness [. . . is a problem for] the political structure of the nation-state and its particular life in the 20th century (one that would no doubt start with the Russian programs and the Armenian genocide)" (29).
9. Brown, *Walled States*, 34.
10. Brown, *Walled States*, 36.
11. Brown, *Walled States*, 28.
12. For an analysis of *Babel* in relationship to Mexican melodrama, see Laura Podalsky, "Migrant Feelings: Melodrama, *Babel*, and Affective Communities," *Studies in Hispanic Cinemas* 7.1 (2010): 47–58. Podalsky argues that *Babel* plunders the traditions of Mexican melodrama, particularly its link to Catholicism, in order to instruct a non-Mexican audience in its structures of ecstatic feeling. In her reading, the emotionless character of law enforcement is juxtaposed to the traumatic suffering of everyday people;

the film's transnational audience is thereby invited to recognize the suffering of such ordinary people, thus indicting the law. In her analysis, Podalsky does not point toward the re-inscription of national/patriarchal paradigms, as I will explore here, but to the film's possible role in employing Mexican structures of feeling in order to create an expansive, global "community of feeling." For an analysis of the role of the law in the film regarding the film's elaboration/problematization of sovereignty, see Elizabeth S. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty: The Politics of Enclosure in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 82.4 (Fall 2013): 950–973. Though Anker also points toward the film's creation of an "unbounded and multiple, rather than unified, self-identical, and enclosed" community, her reading falls on a less utopic conclusion as she notes that the law officials in each of the film's segments work to enforce and codify "the exclusions that sustain the body politic" and thus affirming larger structures of geopower (968).

13. The eldest boy dies in the process of attempting to escape.
14. Note that the "originary" event in the film takes place before the start of our story and is never represented outside of the two photographs of the Japanese man with his hunting trophies, accompanied by the Moroccan man. The other two events that have occurred before the start of the narrative are the death of the American couple's infant from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and the suicide of the Japanese girl's mother.
15. Bogart's neutrality in the film is an echo of the US stance; his eventual involvement presages the imminent American involvement in the war. The moral of the film hinges on Bogart giving up his neutrality for the greater good; by film's end, he finally takes an altruistic stand rather than to continue to look out for his best interests alone.
16. Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
17. Cate Blanchett, who plays Susan Jones, is an Australian actress. Thus, through her star persona, Blanchett's presence also serves to personify something akin to a global "whiteness."
18. For Richard Jones, the conflict is one that money can solve. He says to Amelia: "cancel your son's wedding, I'll pay for another one, I'll pay for a better one."
19. David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 94–103.
20. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 99.
21. Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 103.
22. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983): 26.
23. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 961.
24. An article in *The New York Times* describes the campaign: "[t]he city that wants to be known as 'the world's second home,' to quote a trademark application recently filed by the Bloomberg administration, is about to be inundated by a marketing blitz from a company that promotes itself as 'the world's local

bank.' " See Stuart Elliot, "A Bank That Isn't Your Average New Yorker Starts to Spread News about Itself," *New York Times* (April 19, 2005).

25. We do see this view again, in the middle of the film, when Noam and Lulu "pass" as TV reporters. But during those particular shots, we know Noam is behind the camera. Though interestingly, this view returns at the border, something that emphasizes the "entry" of this space into the interior of Tel Aviv's Sheinkin St., to disastrous consequences. Also, by bookending the film in this way, a contrast is set between the view of the television camera and the view of the film camera—as if staking a claim that one channels reality whereas the other one represents a fiction (or, literally, the fantasy of a world where Palestinians and Israelis could coexist). At various points throughout the narrative, this contrast seems to be drawn between the fiction that unfolds on our screen and the reality of the newsworthy situations that occasionally irrupt into the narrative through television screens.
26. For a reading on the sexualization of the act of inspection at the checkpoint and queer identities, see Omar Kholeif, "Queering Palestine: Piercing Eytan Fox's Imagined Bubble with Sharif Waked's *Chic Point*" *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 80, 27.2 (2012): 155–160.
27. For a reading of this scene, see also Stein, "Explosive," 526–530.
28. For example, as disaster has hit the film one last time, Lulu assures Yali, who lies on a hospital bed, himself a victim of a suicide bombing, with "your *panna cotta* is on the way, and everything will be fine."
29. "Clinton, Obama Promote Gay Rights as Human Rights around the World" CNN.com, December 6, 2011.
30. Sarah Schulman, "Israel and 'Pinkwashing,' " *New York Times*, November 22, 2011, accessed March 23, 2012, at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html.
31. Jasbir Puar, "The Golden Handcuffs of Gay Rights: How Pinkwashing Distorts Both LGBTIQ and Anti-Occupation Activism," *Jadaliyya*, February 7, 2012, accessed March 23, 2012, at http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4273/the-golden-handcuffs-of-gay-rights_how-pinkwashing. On gay Palestinian identity as imagined within Israeli colonialism, see also Kholeif, "Queering Palestine."
32. Jasbir Puar, "Israel's Gay Propaganda War," *Guardian*, July 1, 2010, accessed March 23, 2012, at http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jul/01/israels-gay-propaganda-war. For an analysis of "homonationalism" in Fox' films, see Raz Yosef, "Homonational Desires: Masculinity, Sexuality, and Trauma in the Cinema of Eytan Fox," in *Israeli Cinema: Identities in Motion*, eds. Miri Talmon and Yaron Peleg (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011): 181–198.
33. Udi Aloni, "An Appeal to Israeli Filmmakers," *CounterPunch*, August 28–30, 2009, accessed September 6, 2009, at http://www.counterpunch.org/2009/08/28/an-appeal-to-israeli-filmmakers/.
34. Amal Amireh, "Afterword," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16.4 (2010): 639.

35. Amireh, "Afterword," 639. The report she cites is *Nowhere to Run: Palestinian Asylum-Seekers in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Buchman Faculty of Law, 2008), at www.law.tau.ac.il/Heb/Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/NowheretoRun.pdf.
36. Brown, *Walled States*, 30.
37. Brown, *Walled States*, 30.
38. Stein, "Explosive," 529–530.
39. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 967.
40. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 967.
41. "Ceuta, the Border-Fence of Europe," accessed July 1, 2014, at www.wordpress.org/Europe/3371.
42. "Melilla: Europe's Dirty Secret," April 16, 2010, accessed July 3, 2014, at http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/17/melilla-migrants-eu-spain-morocco.
43. Perhaps not coincidentally, another Mexican director, Alfonso Cuarón, also released his film *Children of Men* in 2006. The film depicts a dystopian future that likewise channels a world-spanning imaginary that is marked by the proliferation of borders and checkpoints, and an immigration crisis (also presented as a population crisis) is centrally featured.
44. The trope of woman, border, and wedding dress is also at the center of *The Syrian Bride* (Eran Riklis, 2004).
45. Marciniak, Imre, O'Healy, *Transnational Feminism*, 6. In Anker's reading of the film, this is the role that Santiago's car, carrying the two American children, plays in distinguishing between the opposing categories of citizen and alien (967).
46. Marciniak, Imre, O'Healy, *Transnational Feminism*, 7.
47. Marciniak, Imre, O'Healy, *Transnational Feminism*, 8.
48. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 969.
49. See Hassapopoulou, "*Babel*."
50. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 962–963, 969.
51. " 'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Gender, Race, and Nationalism," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 89.
52. Brown, *Walled States*, 52.
53. Brown, *Walled States*, 43.
54. Brown, *Walled States*, 81.
55. Anker argues that the bus, for example, as a "floating zone of sovereignty," is already an image of sovereignty in its twilight: "The bus's jurisdiction is ambulatory and itinerant, just as sovereignty is progressively detached from precise geographical referents" ("In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 963).
56. Hassapopoulou also notes of the centrality of the helicopter ride in determining the American characters' privilege:

> we see the local people gathered outside, looking up to the helicopter taking the American couple to the hospital. The US couple not only becomes the

center of this Moroccan gathering, but is also at the center of a media frenzy once they reach the hospital. Therefore, even if the film's discourse does not ultimately favor the "Western" side of the story, the film's focus suggests that the US couple is the most influential part of the chain of events.

57. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 963.
58. Rather than focus on how Susan's segment organizes narrative temporality and its resolution, Anker also usefully emphasizes the question of citizenship: "it is Susan's American citizenship that cancels and subordinates all other interests to her own. The struggle to save her life and avenge the underlying violation of the symbolic American body politic throws an entire region into turmoil" (963).
59. According to 2011 data of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).
60. Volleyball was introduced into Japan by Hyozo Omori, who had trained under William G. Morgan at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA; Holyoke, MA) in the early 1900s—Morgan blended elements of basketball, baseball, tennis, and handball in order to develop a sport with the explicit goal of creating a game "for his classes of businessmen which would demand less physical contact than basketball." See "History of Volleyball," accessed July 4, 2014, at http://www.volleyball.org/history.html, and "JVA History," accessed July 4, 2014, at http://www.jva.or.jp/en/jva/history.html. Japan's women's volleyball team is one of the dominant teams in the world.
61. Peter Brooks, "The Text of Muteness," *New Literary History* 5.3 (1974): 549–564. He goes on to say, "different kinds of drama have their corresponding sense deprivations: for tragedy blindness, since it is about insight and illumination; for comedy, deafness, since comedy is concerned with misunderstanding, failures in communication" (549).
62. Anker, "In the Shadowland of Sovereignty," 962.
63. Anker, "In the Shadowland of Sovereignty," 962–964.
64. Anker, "In the Shadowland of Sovereignty," 971.
65. Anker, "In the Shadowland of Sovereignty," 971. Or, as she notes earlier in her article, "Babel is aesthetically absorbed with the profound disorderliness of embodied community" (965).
66. On the subject of the allegory of the Tower of Babel in *Metropolis*, see Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000).
67. Quoted in Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, 56.
68. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 970.
69. Anker, "In the Shadowlands of Sovereignty," 960.
70. As part of his mission, the film's protagonist, heterosexual and homophobic Eyal (Lior Ashkenazi), a lethally effective and dedicated Mossad agent, befriends a young, gay German man—Axel (Knut Berger)—who is the grandson of a Nazi war criminal. Eyal's assignment is to find out whether the man, now in his nineties, is still alive, and, if so, he must annihilate him. The film also gives Eyal a compelling backstory: he is struggling with the loss of his wife, who committed suicide, having blamed him for her misfortune.

At the film's close, with the chance to complete his mission literally at his fingertips, Eyal second-guesses himself and fails to destroy his Nazi target. Instead, Eyal witnesses the man's own grandson, who has now learned the truth of his grandfather's past, murder him—in effect exacting a more damning revenge than any the Israeli intelligence could think up. This already highly melodramatic, historically reparative gesture is bolstered by Eyal's reward—who, through his developing friendship with Axel, has also been cured of his homophobia; the epilogue montage, which is guided by Axel's voice-over, informs us that Eyal marries Axel's sister and has a baby with her. The reparative gesture in *Walk on Water* thus happens both at a historical and at a personal level. The film melodramatically proposes that love and time can erase the deep-seated wounds—and exorcise the harrowing trauma.

71. Two memory flashbacks also shot in home movie style precede it—one that tells of Ashraf's childhood memory, the other of Noam's.
72. Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990): 1–7.
73. Brown, *Walled States*, 54.
74. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," 1.
75. cited in Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," 1. The quote is from Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 19.

Chapter 4

1. See Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson, *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007); Saverio Giovacchini and Robert Sklar, *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
2. Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
3. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Pedro Costa*, booklet for Tate Modern retrospective (2009).
4. Dave McDougall, "Youth on the March: The Politics of Colossal Youth," May 15, 2007, accessed May 8, 2008, at http://chainedtothecinematheque.blogspot.com/2007/05/youth-on-march-politics-of-colossal.html. Costa is so fascinated by the incongruity of his own memory of the Carnation Revolution in contrast to Ventura's that his next film focuses wholly on Ventura during this time period; see an interview by Victoria Reale, "El cine es paciencia," *Revista Ñ*, September 7, 2013, accessed September 8, 2013, at http://www.revistaenie.clarin.com/escenarios/Pedro-Costa-cine-paciencia_0_980302010.html.
5. See Vered Maimon, "Beyond Representation: Abbas Kiarostami's and Pedro Costa's Minor Cinema," *Third Text* 26.3 (2012): 342.
6. Interview with Pedro Costa in *Ainda não começámos a pensar*, March 2007, accessed August 9, 2013, at http://aindanaocomecamos.blogspot.com/2007_03_01_archive.html.

7. Jean-Louis Comolli, "Frames and Bodies: Notes on Three Films by Pedro Costa: *Ossos*, *No Quarto da Vanda*, *Juventude em Marcha*," *Afterall* 24 (Summer 2010): 62–70.
8. Richard James Havis, "Illusory Worlds: An Interview with Jia Zhangke," *Cineaste* 30.4 (Fall 2005): 58–59.
9. Though the film's action purportedly only takes place at the World Park, some of its sequences were also shot at the Window of the World park in the city of Shenzhen.
10. For an analysis of the Chinese workers as represented in *The World* and the film's intersection with the larger realities affecting how workers experience their new neoliberal identity, see Keith B. Wagner, "Jia Zhangke's Neoliberal China: The Commodification and Dissipation of the Proletarian in *The World*," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2013): 361–377.
11. Tonglin Lu, "Fantasy and Reality of a Virtual China in Jia Zhangke's *The World*," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 2.3 (2008): 172.
12. See "Times Zones and Jet Lag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema," in Nataša Ďurovičová and Kathleen Newman, *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2010): 86.
13. They also bond over the song that is about the capital of Mongolia—the country between Russia and China. It is their "in-between" capital.
14. See Patrícia Pereira, "Urban Renewal in Global Context: The Conversion of the Lisbon Eastern Waterfront," CESNOVA/Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas da Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal) and University of Massachusetts Boston (United States), https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/geography/conferences/eursc/16-09-10/PatriciaPereira.pdf, accessed October 19, 2013.
15. See Bert Cardullo, *André Bazin and Italian Neorealism* (New York: Continuum Press, 2011): 42–43.
16. Martha Nochimson, "The Melodramatic Neorealism of Luchino Visconti," *Cineaste* (Spring 2003): 45–48. Despite her use of the term "melodramatic neorealism," Nochimson still understands these terms to be opposite. For example, she calls *Ossessione* an "operatic, neorealist melodrama," only to clarify, in the sentence that follows, that the film is not "a fully evolved neorealist work" (45), as if the melodrama were in fact that which needs shedding for neorealism to fully come into focus. In this respect, she thus finds it ironic that it was a melodramatic director like Visconti who created the film that "may be the purest example of neorealism created in the Italian postwar period, *La Terra Trema*" (46), and yet she amends this by noting that it nonetheless "contains a series of eminently recognizable melodramatic narrative strategies" (46). Or, if melodrama is the focus of analysis, then neorealism is that which is left aside; see Veronica Pravadelli, "Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*: Identity, Melodrama, and the National-Popular," *Annali d'Italianistica* 24 (Annual 2006): 234.
17. Nochimson, "The Melodramatic Neorealism of Luchino Visconti."
18. *Ossessione*, a film shot two years earlier, and which is often also cited as the first neorealist film, does not escape from melodrama—quite the contrary.

19. See Marcia Landy, "*Rome, Open City*: From Movie to Method," in *Film Analysis*, eds. Jeffrey Geiger and R. L. Rutsky (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2005): 410.
20. As Millicent Marcus notes, "the traumatic nature of the representation explains the inordinate impact of Pina's death—a death which can be considered, in retrospect and with appropriate irony, the *scena madre* of neorealism" (428); in "Pina's Pregnancy, Traumatic Realism, and the After-Life of *Open City*," *Italica* 85.4 (Winter 2008): 426–438.
21. See Landy, "*Rome, Open City*," 409.
22. Their "queer" character further emphasized by the use of a set and studio lighting—the very kind of aesthetic from which neorealism strived to move away.
23. See Marcus, "Pina's Pregnancy," 432.
24. See Marcus, "Pina's Pregnancy," 428–430. On Pina's death, see also Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, 116–124.
25. Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, xv.
26. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976): 22.
27. See Agustín Zarzosa, *Refiguring Melodrama in Film and Television*: *Captive Affects, Elastic Sufferings, Vicarious Objects* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013).
28. Zarzosa, *Refiguring Melodrama*, 48.
29. See Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*; Williams, "Melodrama Revised," in *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998): 42–88;" and Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI Publishing, 1987): 5–39.
30. Schoonover, *Brutal Vision*, xiii.
31. See, for example, Elisabeth Anker, "Villains, Victims, and Heroes: Melodrama, Media, and September 11," *Journal of Communication* (March 2005): 22–37.
32. Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): 59–99.
33. Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, 82.
34. Linda Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 70.
35. Footnote record scene where Ventura plays record.
36. Dave McDougall, "Youth on the March: The Politics of Colossal Youth," http://chainedtothecinematheque.blogspot.com/2007/05/youth-on-march-politics-of-colossal.html, accessed May 8, 2008.
37. For an analysis of the role of the frame in *Colossal Youth* and the other two films that make up the trilogy, see Comolli, "Frames and Bodies."
38. It is not technically his final one, since the last scene in the film has Ventura arrive at Vanda's to look after her child while she goes to work. But he no longer leaves Vanda's space: the film closes on an image of Ventura lying face up on Vanda's bed, while the little girl plays around him.

39. Perhaps one exception is the over-the-top gesture that Niu makes of setting his jacket on fire during one of his jealousy fits, yet he does, despite the spectacle he creates, remain unharmed.
40. See the "Welcome Statement" on the Partex Oil and Gas Group website: http://www.partex-oilgas.com/.
41. "Speculation over Art Treasure: Gulbenkian Death Stirs Gallery Circles Here," *Washington Post* (July 21, 1955).
42. Luís Batalha and Jørgen Carling, eds. *Transnational Archipelago: Perspectives on Cape Verdean Migration and Diaspora* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008): 62–71.
43. "Gulbenkian's Art Gets Home in Lisbon," *New York Times* (October 3, 1969). These pieces, according to the article, are "two Rembrandts, 'The Portrait of an Old Man' and 'Pallas Athene,' the Rubens portrait of 'Helene Fourment' and the Houdon statue of 'Diana' as well as a rich collection of Thomas Germain silver that had been made for Catherine the Great."
44. Eugene Kotlyarenko, "Colossal Cinema: The Films of Pedro Costa—Conversation," accessed March 25, 2010, at http://www.artinamericamagazine.com.
45. For a reading of Ventura against the backdrop of the museum's masterpieces and the relationship that Costa thus draws between film and other art forms, see Rancière, "The Politics of Pedro Costa."
46. This is not the first time we see Tiananmen Square in the film—in the scene that just precedes this one, when Tao is on the bus returning from Taisheng's, the camera pans from the TV screen inside the bus, on which we see a slide show of tourist landmarks around the world, to Tao sitting next to a window. Outside the window, we briefly see Tiananmen Square as the bus drives past it. The window of the bus and the screen of the TV make the sites equally inaccessible from Tao's vantage point.
47. Perhaps the movement tracked is from the developments of an industrial revolution that began to change (by compressing) the parameters of time and space to their virtualization, or virtual disappearance.
48. Dudley Andrew, "Time Zones and Jet lag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema," in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Nataša Ďurovičová and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010): 84.
49. Sam Adams, "Letters from Fontainhas: Three Films by Pedro Costa," *Los Angeles Times* (March 28, 2010).
50. Hamid Naficy, *Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001): 101.
51. The following transcript contains a compilation of the different variations of the letter, which eventually switches its register from one of hope to one of despair:

> My love, meeting again will brighten our lives for at least thirty years, I'll return to you renewed and full of strength. I wish I could offer you one-hundred thousand cigarettes, a dozen fancy new dresses, a car, that little lava house you always dreamed of, and a forty-cent bouquet. But most

> of all, drink a bottle of good wine and think of me. The work here never stops. There are over a hundred of us now. Two days ago, on my birthday, I thought about you for a long while. Every day, every minute, I learn beautiful new words just for you and me, tailor-made for us both like fine silk pajamas. I can only send you one letter a month. Did my letter arrive safely? Still no word from you. Maybe soon. I'm still waiting. Sometimes I get scared building these walls, me with a pick and cement, you with your silence, pushing you deeper into a pit of forgetting. It hurts to see these things I don't want to see. Your lovely hair slips through my fingers like dry glass. Sometimes I grow weak and think I'll forget.

52. See Rancière, "The Politics of Pedro Costa." Here, Rancière also links the letter's cinematic origin to Costa's *Casa de Lava*: one of its characters, Edite (Edith Scob), has a love letter from her former lover, a prisoner in Tarrafal. For Desnos's letter, see "Letter to Youki" (1944), in *The Voice of Robert Desnos: Selected Poems* translated by William Kulik (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: University Press of New England, 2004): 183.

Conclusion: Of *Gravity* and Tears

1. Elizabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014): 3.
2. Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2010): 107.
3. See Dave Brody, "Making 'Gravity': How Filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón Created 'Weightlessness' without Spaceflight," Space.com, October 3, 2013, accessed January 30, 2015, at http://www.space.com/23073-gravity-movie-weightlessness-alfonso-cuaron.html.
4. Introduction to "Aningaaq," *Gravity* DVD special features (Warner Bros.: Los Angeles, 2014).
5. Stanley Cavell, *Contesting Tears: The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 118.

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