The modern political film:
biopolitical production and cinematic subjectivity

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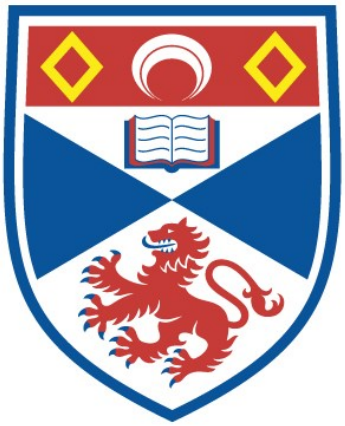

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Abstract

This project uses Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the minor cinema to argue for a contemporary political mode of film that critiques dominant or majoritarian ideologies. I argue that these 'modern political films' perform this critique by rupturing the sensory-motor schemata that make up official times and create a space for everyday life and labor to emerge on screen. While political theorists such as Carl Schmitt argue proper politics necessitate oppositional conflict and dialectical progression, a classical model based on the opposition between ultimately Other subjects, modern political films challenge this notion by fragmenting the concept of an appropriate subject and revealing the networks that contribute to and create modern, multifaceted subjects. I locate modern political films in four global contexts: Algeria, Iran, China, and the United States. While the political circumstances of each context differ greatly, the filmmakers I examine turn to a slower pace or use of cinematic time that resists narrative conclusion to address political, economic, and social issues affecting populations within these global locations. Through this slower pace, these directors also address the biopolitical concerns of the subjects they depict: intolerable laws, ideologies, and economic forces that structure or otherwise control how individuals live their lives. As a result, these films operate according to a particular form of politics that opposes the subject-creating assemblages of regulatory biopower, and affirms the potential for new life to emerge on screen.

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I, Matthew Holtmeier, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a candidate for the degree of PhD in Film Studies in September, 2009; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2009 and 2012.

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> Existence is not dialectical. It is not
> representable. It is hardly even livable!
> *Félix Guattari*

Political discussion between peoples or as part of the operation of a text has the potential to engender range of responses, such as debate or even conflict, which lead to either a greater awareness or potential change. This does not mean, however, that such conflict moves forth dialectically. To suggest that all politics moves dialectically would misunderstand a fundamental facet of contemporary networks, whether social, biological, political, or economic. Namely, that to suggest that politics can be dialectical focuses too much on two centers, as loci of political organization, to the detriment of the many, or Multitude, that make up modern peoples. Without the centering of two, perhaps opposed, political factions, however, representing political conflict becomes complicated. Despite the difficulty of political representation in many modern contexts, the desire for its expression erupts through and permeates what I call modern political films, precipitating a people to come. While this 'precipitation' is not the same as the dialectical revolution of traditional political films and certain third cinema projects, it does entail a breaking point with concurrent political climates. Rather than violent action or the instantiation of a new regime, however, modern political films reach this point through an encounter with the intolerable. As per the epigraph from Félix Guattari, this encounter with the intolerable, as I frame it, illustrates the point at which a subject or people realizes that their current way of life is unsustainable, or 'hardly even livable' (Guattari 23, 1993). This project addresses three facets important to these modern political films: their rupture of majoritarian cinematic time, the introduction of politics

to personal or existential narratives, and the biopolitical production of subjectivity on screen. In focusing on these facets of contemporary political film, I borrow from both Deleuze and Guattari's work on 'minor literatures' and Deleuze's solo work on 'modern political cinemas', but explicitly focus on how each concept operates on cinematic subjectivity, which I believe is integral to their politics. Due to the increasingly fragmented, yet networked, nature of subjects, communities, and political struggles from the 1990's to the present, I argue that these modern political films are increasingly appropriate to contemporary politics. An example of these modern political struggles includes the popular 'Occupy' movements seen around the world.

At the 1999 summit, the World Trade Organization [WTO] met with opposition in the streets of Seattle, Washington as swarms of protesters gathered to prevent their meeting. An important event in world history, it seemed at the time no one expected such fierce resistance – or at least, the fierce retribution from police – or the level of cooperation amongst the diverse individuals who arrived to protest. College students joined the ranks of environmental organizations, labor unions, and others without such collective affiliation. Those taking part in the protest had a common goal despite the diversity of their constitution: to speak out against the wielding of global power in favor of a rich minority of countries and the exploitation of less powerful countries. The individuals that converged in Seattle during the WTO summit were taking part in anti-globalization, anti-capitalist movements combating the spread of neoliberal economic policies, even while their basic claims may have been for a less clearly defined global justice. Significantly, perhaps as a sign of the success of these protests, subsequent summits of

the WTO, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank met with similar opposition across the world. While momentous in 1999, the WTO protests have now been surpassed by much larger movements for social justice, however: most notably Occupy Wall Street [OWS]. OWS started with a very basic purpose, to protest in favor of the 99% against the 1% - stemming from a basic claim that 1% of the population in the United States holds a majority of the wealth, and Wall Street is a major center of the wealth for this 1%. While OWS is even more diverse and diffuse than the WTO protests, the size, breadth, and duration of OWS protests have greatly outstripped the WTO protests, to the point where major cities across the world, and even some relatively small cities, sustained their own 'Occupy' movements. With the arrival of this relatively similar, but far larger, global protest movement just 12 years later, these protests suggest something important about the period from the late 90's to the early 2010's. There are a multitude of issues influencing the arrival of these protests, and each protester undoubtedly has their own unique agenda, but they have been prompted by the increasing gaps between classes, greater channels for communication and the dissemination of information, and the desire to come together in the face of something "*intolerable*, the unbelievable, the impossibility of living now in 'this' society" (Deleuze 1989, 222, my emphasis).

The presence of something intolerable explains the political value of the films I focus on: they provide real examples in particular political contexts of what is intolerable to a set of individuals. In depicting the intolerable within particular communities, or a set of diverse individuals, modern political films start to create space for collective

enunciations shared by a nascent group. This engenders a new form of political organization, distinct from what I will call a classical politics, or groups that attempt to replace one dominant or majoritarian system with another. This is a political project within cinema that I identify as increasingly emerging in films from the 1990's to the 2010's – although I would not strictly limit such politics to this time frame – and one that appears in films throughout the world. To understand this transition, I borrow an important political discussion from Gilles Deleuze and his work on minor literatures, which addresses the 'minor' use of majoritarian discourses, discourses that are often naturalized by their widespread use. This supposed natural state, however, ensures conflict as subjects that cannot conform to the strict boundaries of the majoritarian discourse come into contact with it. Throughout all of the contexts I look at in this project – Algeria, Iran, China, and the United States – subjects within films brush up against majoritarian discourses – whether religious, nation-based, or economic – and reveal the falsity of their homogeneity. Within cinema, the sensory-motor schema, a linear time based on cause-and-effect relationships, has long supported these majoritarian discourses. While there are certainly exceptions to this rule, they tend to stand outside mainstream filmic discourses, where films reliably find funding and distribution. The role of sensory-motor connections is important to the political project of film, I argue, because the modern political film begins its critique at the point where it ruptures the teleology inherent in this oft-dialectical form of cinematic time that relies on resolving conflict by introducing a new norm. In other words, the rupture of traditional forms of film time creates a void, or an empty space, where the political events of these films can occur. The films I focus on in this project fill this void, if it can

said to be filled, with a banal, seemingly disordered realism that focuses on existential narratives and the daily lives of their subjects, rather than grand teloi. To explain the importance of this formal aspect of modern political films, I will first turn to an explanation of how cinematic time has been structured historically. I will then give an overview of the contemporary context I address, discuss the political mode of these films in more depth, and finally explore their interaction with cinematic subjectivity.

Movement and Traditional Politics, Time and Modern Politics

The historical shift in Deleuze's writing on film, from *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1986) to *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1989), provides important context for understanding the political significance of cinematic time in modern political films. I borrow Deleuze's transition between these texts, because they chart a trajectory that moves from an insistence on causal, linear movement and action in films prior to World War Two to an acknowledgment of new forms of time in film after World War Two, and the sensory-motor collapse that defines this shift. I argue here that these new forms of time, though differing from context to context, are what allow politics to enter into seemingly apolitical films. Speaking of the mutation of post-War films, Deleuze points out that “Marxist critics have attacked these films and their characters for being too passive and negative”, but also that this “is not the cinema that turns away from politics, it becomes completely political, but in another way” (Deleuze 1989, 19). Before addressing the contemporary context of the modern political film, I will first show how the historical shift between *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* informs my understanding of contemporary political films using Theodor Adorno's conception of how enlightenment rationalism has developed away from its initial ideals, and the role World War Two

played in this unexpected direction. Looking at the split between the movement- and time-images in relation to Adorno's critique helps to define two issues: first, the place of the time-image in contemporary film, when contemporary film is still largely made up of movement- and action-images; two, what the time-image signals when it appears amidst a volley of other action-images. Whereas Deleuze's passage from movement-image to time-image seems like a historical trajectory on the surface,[1] I argue that it points, instead, to a rupture in majoritarian signifying systems akin to making a 'minor' use of cinematic time. If history plays a role, it is only in that post-War technologies and forms of social organization have allowed this rupture to emerge more readily. Though Adorno had difficulty seeing ways to resist the culture industry, I argue that modern political films provide a critique of enlightenment rationalism within a majoritarian culture industry: meaning unquestioned, cliché, and in service of an elite.

In Deleuze's formulation, World War Two acts as a historical pivot on which these two types of cinema, the movement-image and time-image, can be understood. In *Deleuze and World Cinemas,* David Martin-Jones points out two trends in how scholarship treats the movement from the movement-image to the time-image. For one camp, he argues, "the history that the two cinema books create charts a rupture, or epistemic shift, rather than a linear narrative of progression from movement- to time-image", while the other suggests "Deleuze's two cinema texts provide a linear history of cinema" (Martin-Jones

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[1] Most critics of Deleuze's film philosophy dispel the notion that this is a historical trajectory. D.N. Rodowick, for example, argues that these two regimes are 'images of thought', which are not "images[s] in the sense of cultural representation of the forms, means, and ends of thinking in a historically specific moment" (Rodowick 1997, 176). Angelo Restivo puts it more bluntly: "Of course, Deleuze is not 'doing history,' as he is the first to admit" (Restivo 2000, 171). For a more detailed discussion, see David Martin-Jones 2011, 203-205.

2011, 203). The contention amongst scholarship reveals the difficulty in which this movement can be understood as a fact of cinematic development. In fact, Martin-Jones points out that it is easy to spot what we might call aspects of the time-image in the trick films of George Méliès (Martin-Jones 2011). In a similar vein, most Hollywood blockbusters ascribe to the tenets of the movement-image, regardless of how recently made, which means a transhistorical understanding of this movement has little ground. To explain another way one might understand Deleuze's progression between images, based on Deleuze and Guattari's movement between minor and majoritarian regimes of signification, I turn to the critiques of enlightenment rationalism found in the Frankfurt School. Just as critics such as Adorno found fundamental problems in the once noble project of enlightenment rationalism, which perhaps contributed to the horrors of World War Two, Deleuze understands the shock of World War Two as leveling beliefs in this rationality on a mass scale. As a result, in the medium of film, with its promise of 'reaching the masses' as Deleuze mentions in *Cinema 2*, what evolved instead after World War Two was the inability to represent clear actions and cohesive peoples due to the shattering of belief in the rational acts of people. This fundamental difference between the movement-image and the time-image filters into many aspects of these respective categories, and eventually allows Deleuze to construct a dichotomy between the 'classical political cinema' and the 'modern political cinema'.

Core to the difference between these two images in cinema, Deleuze locates what he calls the sensory-motor schemata operating in the movement-image. In explanation, he argues that 'action-image' cinema moves forward following the basic structure: SAS', or

from situation (S), to action (A), to modified situation (S') (Cinema 1, 142). To explain this structure, Deleuze gives the example of the duel in the Western where two gunslingers face off, such as in *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* and *High Noon*. In these examples, the film begins with a situation (S), the two (or three, in the case of *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*) gunslingers facing off, perhaps representing the interests of two social milieus in the film, proceeds with action (A), the shootout, and ends with a changed situation (S'), one gunslinger emerging victorious and thus entering into a slightly changed situation with his environ. Deleuze argues that action-image films proceed by repeating this basic structure: the single gunslinger, in his new situation (S'), must take another action (A), which leads to a new situation (S") and so on. This basic structure of the action-image is built upon a 'sensory-motor schemata' (Cinema 1, 155). The sensory-motor schemata can be defined by the necessity of characters to 'burst into action' in order to resolve a situation within the film, a necessity which permeates the formal features of an action-image film, "its framings, its cutting, its montage" (Cinema 1, 155). In other words, the sensory-motor schemata can be understood as the rational links between S, A, and S', and to understand the move between these moments in a film the viewer must understand formally how a situation leads to an action, which leads to a changed situation. As Deleuze goes on to argue, these connections can actually be quite complex, depending on "objects adjacent to the situation: even imaginary contact with a material, with a glass, a particular sort of glass, or a fabric, a costume, an instrument", which "awaken[s] an affective memory" (Cinema 1, 158). Regardless of how complex the connections in the SAS' structure are, however, the sensory-motor schemata ensures that the causal links between the situation and explosive action are 'visible' or coherent

to the viewer.

This clear sensory-motor schemata begins to break down in the move to the time-image. From the beginning, Deleuze explains this breakdown in political terms: "the crisis which has shaken the action-image has depended on many factors which only had their full effect after the war, some of which were social, economic, political, moral and others more internal to art, to literature and to the cinema in particular" (Cinema 1, 206). Referring to World War Two as the pivotal point of change from the movement-image to the time-image, he highlights social, economic, political and moral factors as turbulent forces that began eating away at our belief in rational causal connections: "The first things to be compromised everywhere are the linkages of situation-action, action-reaction, excitation-response, in short, the sensory-motor links which produced the action-image" (Cinema 1, 206). In *Cinema 2*, where he more directly addresses the deterioration of the sensory-motor schemata, Deleuze focuses on particular historical events which lead to our disbelief in the sensory-motor schemata even more explicitly. He cites 'the rise of Hitler', 'Stalinism', and 'the break-up of the American people' (Cinema 2, 216). In each of these cases, he argues, beliefs regarding nations, democracy, and the rational acts of individuals were compromised by the horrors of World War Two and the ways in which 'the people' as a unified subject were co-opted in order to be exploited by individuals like Hitler and Stalin (as well as the US in general, it is suggested, though no particular agent is named). As a result, the sensory-motor schemata with its rational coherence and clear causal relationships begins to make less sense for a war-torn world where the ability for individuals to believe in a cause, and

commit their entire being to a particular subject-position (in a unified '*the people*'), has been compromised. While Deleuze attributes a great number of features to the time-image that arrive to address this dearth in belief – the co-presence of past-present-future, the mobilization of the powers of the false, and the emergence of a new type of political cinema – its arrival itself can be understood in terms of the inability for post-war subjects to believe in the sensory-motor schemata.

While Deleuze only mentions him in passing, Adorno's critique of enlightenment rationalism provides a particularly useful way to understand this break in 'belief' for Deleuze. Understanding this break in belief is core to the political importance of modern political films, because it is predicated upon, as D.N. Rodowick argues, "Belief [that] is no longer belief in a transcendent world, or in a transformed world, but a belief in *this* world and *its* powers of transformation" (Rodowick 1997, 192). In other words, belief in one's ability to take (potentially political) action in the world, and to affect one's environment. While arguably part of the larger project of the Frankfurt School, Adorno directly critiques the concept of enlightenment rationalism in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (originally published 1944). His argument tracks a trajectory beginning with the construction of enlightenment rationality and ending with the co-option of this so called 'rationality' to exploit and even eradicate entire peoples, often under the aegis of capitalism, even though this rationality purported to create an 'enlightened age' (Adorno 2002, 1 and 30). If one considers Deleuze's move from the movement-image to the time-image in the context of Adorno's critique of the enlightenment, the time-image and its cinematic products, such as the modern political cinema, become a form of

counter-enlightenment. The time-image as counter-enlightenment figures Adorno's concept of the enlightenment, which he has called "an outright deception of the masses", as the economic, social, and historical context from which a general disillusionment has emerged (Adorno 2002, 34). Like Adorno's critique of what he sees as a particular, yet abstract, form of control, Deleuze similarly documents economic, social, and artistic products that have both existed as part of co-opted rationality, in the movement-image, and begins to critique it, in the time-image, through films that pierce the clichés of the mainstream film industry by constructing a belief in the world. Understanding Deleuze's work in this context helps to elaborate the political importance of the shift from movement- to time-image.

Adorno begins his critique of enlightenment rationalism by positing its general aims, while noting the disjuncture between these aims and global situations such as World War Two: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity" (Adorno 2002, 1). In making this argument, Adorno suggests that enlightenment has permeated the world, 'the wholly enlightened earth', yet rather than utopia, 'triumphant calamity' has emerged. Adorno understands this triumphant calamity not as the spread of rational, free-thinking peoples across the globe, which were the purported aims of the enlightenment, but the increasing 'machinization' of our social, economic, cultural, and even psychological registers. In combating 'myth' and other irrational beliefs, science has granted the enlightened power over nature, but this has produced a new way of understanding the

world based on formulas and abstract logic. Adorno explains: "For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion" (Adorno 2002, 3). His critique of this rationalization quickly takes on a political register, because, for Adorno, rationalizing becomes a tool that allows particular subjects control over others: "Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them" (Adorno 2002, 6). Throughout his discussion, it is important to note that Adorno sees no 'puppet masters' pulling the strings of historical development, but rather that this rationality has been imbricated within all aspects of life and thus altered historical development due to this inculcation. As a result, it is difficult to point fingers at particular leaders, but that does not mean certain individuals have not relied on this rationality to justify reprehensible acts.

Just as Deleuze returns to the examples of Hitler and Stalin in *Cinema 2* to provide examples of individuals who co-opted the masses for 'rational' purposes, Adorno turns to similar examples citing totalitarian regimes. In cases where one might point out the evils of a particular regime, Adorno explains that this awareness can be lost through rationality's abstraction: "Abstraction, the instrument of enlightenment, stands in the same relationship to its objects as fate, whose concept it eradicates: as liquidation", which lends credence to his earlier argument: “Ruthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness” (Adorno 2002, 9, 2). This concept of abstraction reveals the heart of Adorno's critique of the enlightenment: because of systematization, the reduction of reality to mathematical or scientific

principles, and the reliance on 'rationality', the enlightenment has produced a 'new barbarism' where principles are followed without the greater awareness of their results, a point similar to what Deleuze will later call cliché (Adorno 2002, 25). As a case study, Adorno mentions the Hitler Youth: "The horde, a term which doubtless is to be found in the Hitler Youth organization, is not a relapse into the old barbarism but the triumph of repressive égalité, the degeneration of the equality of rights into the wrong inflicted by equals" (Adorno 2002, 9). The program Hitler youth followed was rationalized as character building, part of a project to build a strong social base for Germany in the years to come. Lacking a self-awareness or any form of self-critique, however, this project clearly became barbaric in its institution of anti-Semitism. This is the epitome, Adorno might argue, of the evils enlightenment rationality can inflict through its programmatic rationalization. The masses of Hitler Youth, the horde, became a people to be exploited by the political program of the Nazis. And in inflicting their *rational beliefs* against the world, through anti-Semitism and genocide, the Nazis struck a blow to our belief in rationality that was addressed through World War Two. As a result, Deleuze locates World War Two as his historical pivot-point between a cinema that engages in rational connections through a sensory-motor schemata, and one that cannot do so, because its belief in this sensory-motor schemata has been shattered by the mass exploitation of peoples under its banner. The rupture Deleuze locates is not universal, however, and arguments that universalize this shift misappropriate its political potential. This argument *seems* universal, I would argue, because of the breadth of impact World War Two had on many people throughout the world, but at the same time Deleuze admits exceptions to the rule (such as Ozu, pre-World War Two; Martin-Jones 2011,

205). Instead, World War Two presents a relatively large scale realization that certain majoritarian ideologies, here I define this as enlightenment rationalism, are creating problems, resulting in many minor-uses of the cinematic medium that “isolate a lived present beneath the myth, which could be intolerable, the unbelievable, the impossibility of living now in 'this' society” (Deleuze 1989, 222).

With the emergence of the time-image in the post-war period, Deleuze notes five features that can be attributed to the weakening of the sensory-motor schemata: "*the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of cliches, the condemnation of the plot"* (Cinema 1, 210). While these are explored in depth as part of the project of the time-image, it is useful to note the role disillusionment with Adorno's enlightenment rationality plays in their development, particularly in terms of Nazism. The dispersive situation acknowledges the dangers of the universalizing function of enlightenment rationality. The deliberately weak links between actions and situations, or the dispersion of the SAS' structure, illustrates how causation isn't so clearly articulable – or, in the case of Nazism, their rationalizing led not to a stronger Germany, but the horrors of the Holocaust. The voyage form espouses an aimlessness, which rejects the clear teleologies envisaged by those ascribing to rational cause and effect relationships, and admits the experimental nature of the progression of time. Consciousness of clichés, 'a strong Germany,' acknowledges the false-base of clichés themselves. And the condemnation of the plot critiques the didactic function of cinema as an instructive narrative form, a way to show audiences a proper conclusion. These aspects of the coming time-image that Deleuze lays out in *Cinema 1* are useful in

transitioning to a discussion of the modern political film. These features are present in modern political films, but more importantly, they illustrate the reasons for Deleuze's move away from the movement-image and towards the time-image. Each of these features provides a specific facet of the movement-image or action-image that people can no longer believe in, Deleuze argues, in the post-war environment. With the shaking belief in nationalisms, rational acts, and universal principles, political cinemas must shift away from didactic functions and engage in a new mode of consciousness raising and subject-creation. While the use of World War Two as an instructive examples works with the films Deleuze writes about, modern political films can be found in times and places with no immediate connection to this historical event, because, I argue, the important facet of the political context is the break with a majoritarian regime of signification. Following this argument, I focus on the period of the 1990's to 2010, because of the political shift engendered by the contemporary networked era, where traditional politics based on revolutionary acts are mitigated by spread of networked societies and multifaceted subjectivities.

Networked Subjects: the 1990's to 2010's

If there was a shift in the treatment of time in cinematic narratives post-World War Two based on disillusionment with programmatic rationality – as I argue above, using the frameworks of Deleuze and Adorno – then a similar situation has evolved from the 1990's to 2010's. Whereas this framework developed around nationalisms pre-World War Two, as Deleuze argues, in this later time frame the overarching rationality derives from the economic deregulation beginning in the 1980's and the rise of neoliberal economics. This economic context operates similarly to Adorno's 'Culture Industry':

without a center, yet perpetrating a particular, non-human logic. The increasing ubiquity of this mostly-Western economic strategy has led to resistance from certain nations and peoples, despite its imbrication within the populations of these places. The first and second chapters of this project look at the use of religion and ideology under the banner of Islamic fundamentalism as a strategy to resist Western influence. Other nations, however, have accepted the neoliberal paradigm and promoted ideological apparatuses that encourage its continued operation. Chapter three looks at the increasing economic deregulation in the post-socialist era in China, whereas chapter four turns to the home of neoliberal economics and its transformation of the American Dream in the United States. While these contexts have fundamentally different relationships with this economic paradigm, they share an insistence on the construction of subjectivity in line with national interests. Through constructing majoritarian discursive formations, these national, or at least regional, contexts create the appropriate field for modern political films to emerge and identify a 'people to come' that overflows otherwise rigid depictions of subjectivity.

Noam Chomsky identifies the economic deregulation of the 1980's and 1990's as a 'new era' of globalization, because of the rapidity at which transnational flows began to circulate at this time – even if globalization itself was nothing new (Chomsky 1999, 68). This period is characterized by global leaders taking a neoliberal stance (such as Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom); the establishment of the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank; and the general economic strategies prescribed by the aforementioned institutions in the form of the Washington

Consensus. Furthermore, the communications and information technology growth of the 1990's, which has now shown itself to be something like a 'globalization-singularity' considering the rapid growth and diversification of these transnational flows, has contributed to the ubiquity of globalization as a cultural experience. The films I highlight as modern political cinemas range from the mid 1990's to 2010, part of Chomsky's new era of globalization.

Chomsky's critique of globalization is shared by many contemporary writers such as Naomi Klein, David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri. At the core of this critique is the criticism of a particular brand of capitalism: namely, the neoliberal, free-market Chicago school of capitalism heralded by Milton Friedman. These critics take issue with Friedman's argument that if capitalism were freed from all controls, state or otherwise, then it would naturally balance the economy and bring prosperity to all members of society. Due to its status as 'natural' and the good its founders believe it to accomplish, it has been foisted upon other non-Western countries. This also allows richer countries to enter countries and buy industries and exploit natural resources once trade restrictions have been removed, although this is not the public message advocated by believers in neoliberalism nor what is espoused in the media. Historically, what results from this exploitation of industry is the widening of the gap between rich and poor, rather than the balance the founders of neoliberalism envisioned. Klein argues that this is a process that has been going on since CIA intervention in Iran in the 1950's (Klein 2007, 58), but Harvey adds that it also includes Mexico, Argentina, South Korea, Sweden, and China (Harvey 2007, 87-120). Often

neoliberalism is forced upon countries through debt-restructuring plans. In other words, countries who are deeply indebted to the IMF are given a break if they restructure their country's economic regulations to comply with the neoliberal model. Ostensibly, this opens them up to 'international trade', but as Naomi Klein argues in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), this is often a farce with the purpose of allowing wealthy countries to buy up local industries and resources.

This history of economic globalization has enabled increased communication, migration of peoples, and the export/import of cultural commodities that simultaneously results in a socio-cultural globalization. This is emphasized in David Held's description of globalization as a "process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity" (Held 1999, 16). Held's description is useful, since it describes globalization in terms of *intensities*, or the ways that globalization is actually felt by those who encounter it. Impact characterizes the way that peoples (involuntarily) feel either the economic aspects of this globalization, often due to increasing inequality, but also the cultural products that begin permeating cultures other than their own, as the examples in this project will attest to. Speaking of the micropolitical circulation of images and media in an increasingly networked world, Patricia Pisters argues, “The up-tempo world will make people more fluid and creative, even if that creativity can also be used to reinforce state power or can create all kinds of fundamentalisms to pose blocks of fixed identities (as “safe havens”) in the sea of data, images, and possible

ways of life" (Pisters 2012, 218). As I will discuss in more detail, in the cinematic contexts I examine these 'blocks of fixed identities' are created through the organization of religious identity, censorship, and economic ideologies and provide grounds for majoritarian discourses to establish a norm. Underneath the normative subjects composed by these majoritarian discourses exist multifaceted and often networked subjects that cannot wholly comply to the dictates of the overcoding force. As Shaviro points out in *Connected, or What it Means to Live in the Network Society*, being networked is not always a good thing, but regardless subjects are increasingly compromised, distracted, and fragmented by networks that can pull an individual subject in a multitude of directions (Shaviro 2003). Important to the representation of Held's globalization in film, increasing inequality often plays a prominent role in modern political films, particularly in terms of potential mobility – a separation of the 'locals' and the 'globals'.

As mentioned previously, neoliberal globalization is championed with the promise of spreading prosperity. If the elite do well, or the corporations turn profits, this prosperity will inevitably 'trickle down' to the less well off. The modern political film counters this myth by highlighting a feature of globalization Zygmunt Bauman focuses on in *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998). In his book, Bauman points out that globalization does indeed 'globalize' certain individuals. This means that they are liberated from a place-based experience. They are able to travel freely, consume products of other cultures, and generally benefit from the increased flow of capital across the world. As a result, these individuals are great examples of the ideological

freedom the free-market espouses – they are not subject to regulations, do as they please, and are allowed to fulfill their great potential. At the same time, however, Bauman argues that others are *localized*. This is another 'natural' process of neoliberal practice, which is generally avoided by those who espouse neoliberal policy. Due to increasing inequality, Bauman argues, there are even greater populations who are stripped of their *freedom* to move about the world and engage in global trade through this process of localization. As a result, these individuals become a servant-class that performs the manual labor for the globalized elite (often under dangerous conditions). These peoples may be moved, but they do not have the *freedom* to move – they often relocate based on where work is available, regardless the conditions. The mass-migration to urban centers in China is a good example. The modern political film documents this dual process of globalization and localization, often taking as its very purpose the critique of this promise of prosperity. Whereas your average uncritical or apolitical cinema increasingly takes global movement as a given, the modern political film reveals the class-based nature of this movement and *reveals* localized populations to the spectator. The opposition inherent in this other(ed) class is generally both economic *and* cultural. By focusing on these aspects simultaneously, modern political cinemas reveal the identity-constructing nature of these global flows. People increasingly 'find themselves' in relation to these global flows of information, people, and commodities.

Focusing on the economic impetus of neoliberal-globalization helps to explain the rapidly increasing ubiquity of globalization these films take as their context. Since the

modus operandi of neoliberalism is, as Harvey argues, to force open closed markets, this period or style of globalization is particularly pervasive and helps to explain why certain filmmakers feel the need to respond to these forces in their films. This does not mean, however, that the concerns of these films are purely economic. I argue, instead, that these issues become immediately *biopolitical*. The idea that economic globalization engenders biopolitical issues stems from the arguments that economic globalization is intimately tied to cultural globalization as argued by writers such as Arjun Appadurai and Saskia Sassen – for example, Sassen's argument that "The multiple processes that constitute economic globalization inhabit and shape specific structurations of the economic, the political, the cultural, *and* the *subjective*" (Sassen in Appadurai 2003, 260; my emphasis) – but I further extend this into the realm of the biopolitical using Hardt and Negri's definition of 'class'. For Hardt and Negri, class is not purely a socio-economic term, but invokes discussion of race, sexuality, and identity more broadly, because, for these authors, potential lines of resistance define class. They suggest that "There are, of course, an infinite number of ways that humans can be grouped into classes—hair color, blood type, and so forth—but the classes that matter are those defined by lines of collective struggle" (Hardt and Negri 2006, 104). The reference to hair color and blood type may be hyperbole, but there is an important point to make in that 'class' need not be defined purely by level of income. If working from this definition, discourse theorists, such as Michel Foucault, would argue that class determines the way one *operates in* and *understands the world*. In other words, the global economic and cultural flows enacted by globalization, particularly forceful globalization, affect subjectivity on a biopolitical register – not *just* by mobilizing global

products, but by mobilizing the very composition of peoples, constructing particular populations, and creating classes. On a macro-level, this is most clearly seen in the construction of a globalized-people and a localized-people as mentioned previously. Examples of this include the vast rural labor reserves in China, or the migratory workers in the United States and elsewhere. On a micro-level, modern political films in this project address the specific subjectivities of their characters in order to examine more closely where and how these global flows affect persons. I will return to this when addressing the question of biopolitics more fully, but for now it is important to note that for the context of these films, economic globalization becomes cultural and also biopolitical in addressing the transformation of subjectivities.

While Chomsky argues that we have entered a new era of globalization, the importance of technology in shaping this era, and the formation of networks, is fundamental to the construction of modern subjects. These networks reveal global desires that point to the immobility of certain classes. Starting in the mid-1990's, information technology such as networked computers and wireless technology has rapidly increased in power and decreased in cost. While even recently it has been popular to discuss the 'digital divide', trends in technology have rapidly mitigated such claims of non-access to technologies. As Manuel Castells argues in *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000), we are faced with "a common information system, and to process such information at increasing speed, with increasing power, at decreasing cost, in a potentially ubiquitous retrieval and distribution network" (Castells 2010, 32). I would revise his argument, already over a decade old, to say an *increasingly* ubiquitous retrieval and distribution network rather

than a potential one. While there are undoubtedly still many without access to these communications technologies, the trend is increasingly changing. Many of the films I examine in this project, particularly those post-2005, explicitly address communications technologies such as cellphone and internet-based communication within the space of their narratives. Castells also notes the role these technologies play in promoting globalization:

> Because networks do not stop at the border of the nation-state, the network society constituted itself as a global system, ushering in the new form of globalization characteristic of our time. However, while everything and everybody on the planet felt the effects of this new social structure, global networks included some people and territories while excluding others, so inducing a geography of social, economic, and technological inequality. (xviii)

What Castells says here is more nuanced than the general argument regarding the digital divide: that only some people have access to technology. The films I address here show that the ubiquity of these technologies creates a consciousness of one's localized or globalized existence. This situation is reminiscent of the 'cramped space' of Deleuze and Guattari's minor literatures, where an individual desire actually reflects a political reality. The globe and global movements become a more tangible desire, which only the 'globals' actually have access to. Facing this reality, Castells asks the question: "Then the key issue becomes, as stated by Calderon and Laserna, in a world characterized by simultaneous globalization and fragmentation, 'how to combine new technologies and collective memory, universal science and communitarian cultures, passion and reason?'" (22). While this is a broad problem that no single answer will ameliorate, the modern political cinemas I address in this project offer one subtle solution in the mobilization of subjects.

In the context of increasing inequality, I argue that modern political films have the potential to provide access to the relationship between the daily experiences of individuals and these seemingly intangible forces and flows of globalization. Unfortunately, this is often not a happy task in the films I examine here, which often ends in an encounter with something intolerable. Returning to the sensory-motor break that the modern political film is predicated on, Deleuze argues: "The sensory-motor break makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world… [and] the intolerable is no longer a serious injustice, but the permanent state of daily banality" (Deleuze 1989, 169-170). While increasing inequality is a common feature of the type of globalization I outline here, allowing it to be naturalized as the 'permanent state of daily banality' disallows critiques of such inequalities. It is possible for modern political films, however, to illustrate limit cases by exposing the intolerable and mobilizing subjects such as those involved in OWS. These films require the viewer to think the connection between intolerable situation and the features of globalization they take as their setting. In linking the intolerable to lived populations, modern political films establish a site for political exchange, and begin to form the base of what should be held in common despite the massive deregulation, privatization, and dubious freedoms granted by the unrestricted globalization spanning from 1990-2010. At the same time, while the majoritarian discourses I identify in this project seem to suggest something akin to Samuel P. Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations', the modern political films I address illustrate the falsity of such a future for the actual peoples these political discourses attempt to regulate (Huntington 1996). In other words, the nuanced, networked, and hybridized subjects that emerge from modern relationships with

economic, technical, and cultural globalization often serve to mitigate the conflict Huntington suggests as the future of our world, because the emergence of these subjects does not support the classical politics his argument relies upon. Though the films I focus on in this project belong to the particular contemporary context I outline here, and present a rupture in cinematic time as discussed above, I borrow my analytic framework from Deleuze and Guattari's work on minor literatures, which illustrate the emergence of 'peoples to come' from within otherwise restrictive and majoritarian discourses. This framework is particularly apt for my discussion of these films because of its focus on a political rupture, as well as its focus on the production of subjects.

Becoming-Film: From Minor Literature to Modern Political Cinema

> If the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility
>
> *Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari*

To facilitate my analysis of the political aspects of the films I address in this project, I borrow the related concepts of the minor literature, minor cinema, or modern political cinema from Deleuze and Guattari. While the two writers mostly produced works of philosophy, these concepts are among their most directly political, as they most often deal with the articulations of minority populations. The concept of minor languages ranges through Deleuze and Guattari's texts, with significant developments appearing in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), and *Cinema 2*. Briefly described, the minor is a textual product, voice, or enunciation – often simply called a 'language' by Deleuze and Guattari – set within, but not against, a major language or

discursive source of coding. This often sets up an opposition between the ‘minor’ and the ‘major’, but it is important to note that this is not a binary or oppositional relationship. Instead, the ‘minor’ puts the ‘major’ into variation: rather than coming from the outside of the major language, and opposing it, the minor comes from within the dominant discourse. African American Vernacular English provides a clear example, because it derives from American English, but is also something quite different from American English. By marking a rupture with the dominant discourse, the minor engenders a collective enunciation in that it immediately speaks for a multiplicity. Individuals who find a voice or representation due to this rupture become part of a nascent community of ‘people to come’ that may be diverse, but are a collective in their shared investment in the ‘minor’ language or text. In this section, I will define the concept of the minor literature in order to show its utility for examining the politics of the contemporary films I address. Furthermore, introducing the concept of the minor literature to the cinematic context I've provided helps me to argue that we should not be understanding the time-image as an image of modernity or the natural evolution of a cinematic language, but a rupture in a signifying system that has become so codified and widespread that it has become majoritarian or cliché.

Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature is the second collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari, written three years after their collaborative debut *Anti-Oedipus*. The book centers on the issue of Kafka writing in German as a Czech-born Jew, or the particular uses he makes of the German language, coming from a different cultural and linguistic background. As a result of this particular situation, Kafka’s writing does not produce

different *meanings*, but different *writing-machines*:

> We believe only in a Kafka *politics* that is neither imaginary nor symbolic. We believe only in one or more Kafka *machines* that are neither structure nor phantasm. We believe only in a Kafka *experimentation* that is without interpretation or significance and rests only on tests of experience. (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 7)

As Réda Bensmaïa notes in the foreword, this approach to Kafka is radically different from previous interpretations, because it ultimately makes no recourse to a transcendental meaning or interpretation (Bensmaïa 1986, 7). In reading Kafka, readers are faced with an experimental process, "a writing machine or mass of writing machines that are made of assemblages of nouns and effects, of heterogeneous orders of signs that cannot be reduced to a binary structure, to a dominant or transcendental signifier," which ultimately "lead[s] readers out of the impasse created by so many readings of exegesis" (xi, x). Where previous readers attempted to come to hermeneutical terms with Kafka's project, Deleuze and Guattari find unexpected, unthought-of *experience*. This theoretical understanding of Kafka's work, an experimental rather than hermetic understanding, lays the groundwork for minor enunciations. Deleuze and Guattari outline three principles of minor literatures: they operate in a deterritorialized and deterritorializing manner, they immediately connect the private sphere with public politics, and they always express a collective enunciation.

Deterritorialization is a core concept from Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative work. The process describes the loosening of fixed positions, generally speaking, which they work through in a variety of contexts throughout the authors' oeuvre. Deterritorialization might refer to the disruption of formal features of a text, the

economic processes at work in capitalism, or the weakening of fixed subject positions – for example, the disruption of a coherent national identity. Specifically commenting on Kafka's writing-machines, Deleuze and Guattari explain in *A Thousand Plateaus* that "the assemblage [of Kafka's writing-machines] has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away" (Deleuze and Guattari 1998, 88). In this process-based explanation, stable concepts may be formed by a text, but they are always in danger of being returned to their basic elements or deterritorialized. In terms of film or filmic subjectivity, a categorical structure like the action film or action hero tends to have common qualities that are potentially disrupted by a more playful text's "high coefficient of deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16). There always remains the possibility of a reterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari caution: the possibility for boundaries to reform, perhaps under a different configuration or regime, after they have been loosened by the deterritorializing process. Initially, however, the minor literature is a text that breaks down preconceived ideals or operations, which presents a rupture in majoritarian languages and signifying systems allowing the potential to create new thought in cinema.

The second principle of the minor literature is that each private act is immediately political. Rather than serving as the backdrop for an unfolding story, private life relates immediately to politics. For example, Deleuze and Guattari critique psychoanalysis by arguing that the 'Oedipal phantasm' of the relationship with the father cannot be understood as a natural process or personal psychological problem, but a political

situation. In Kafka's quite lengthy letter to his father, he laments their relationship in an oedipal fashion, suggesting that Kafka's own problems are due to his relationship with his father. Kafka creates an elaborate ploy, however: for Deleuze and Guattari, "The goal is to obtain a blowup of the "photo," an exaggeration of it to the point of absurdity. The photo of the father, expanded beyond all bounds, will be projected onto the geographic, historical, and political *map* of the world" (10). By treating his father in a hyperbolic fashion, Kafka does not oedipalize his father privately, but instead opens up the situation with his father to a whole set of situations in the world. Kafka's relationship with his father becomes his relationship with the German language, with his religion, and his Jewish identity. By moving *through* his neurosis, he starts "Deterritorializing Oedipus into the world instead of reterritorializing everything in Oedipus and the family" (10). In doing so, Kafka collapses interiority and exteriority – in this newly 'cramped space,' problems with the family cannot be separated from political questions surrounding religion and nationality. This discussion of Kafka's situation may be unique, but the authors extend this discussion arguing:

> Minor literature is completely different [from major literatures]; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it. In this way, the family triangle connects to the other triangles – commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical – that determine its values. (17)

Kafka's concern with his father becomes political, because it is no longer a private neurosis, but a concern with commercial, economic, bureaucratic, and juridical issues as well. In the minor literature, it becomes impossible to write off a character's actions as 'individual'.

The third, and most complicated, principle of the minor literature is that "in it everything takes on a collective value" (17). There are several specific textual qualities of a minor literature that help achieve this effect, but Deleuze and Guattari begin by showing how Kafka renounces his role as author and character. Removing both of these components from a text leaves only *writing-machines*, which, as Bensmaïa mentions above, take readers into connections with the unthought in a form of experimentation, rather than producing specific, discursively-situated meanings. In Kafka's writing, "The letter K no longer designates a narrator or a character but an assemblage that becomes all the more machine-like," and, as a result, in the minor literature, "there isn't a subject; *there are only collective assemblages of enunciation*" (18). Where the major literature follows an individual character, an individual story, the minor literature shows how there cannot be an individual character, only a collective *enunciation*. Much like the blurring of the private life into the political, the individual is deterritorialized into the collective. The purpose of the collective enunciation in the minor literature is to create what Deleuze later terms 'a people to come' in *Cinema 2*. In other words, the purpose is to *create* a new people, rather than *represent* an already existing people. The collective potential of the minor rests in its ability to connect with and mobilize a set of people that previously were not able to find expression in major channels or texts.

Ultimately, what is at stake for Deleuze in any discussion of the *minor* is the ability for a text "to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" for the ontological experience of the participant (18). While it is useful to describe this in terms of 'identity', it is important to note that this is something that takes place in experiential

reality, rather than as a category for sorting peoples. For this reason, I choose to focus on subjectivity rather than national or racial identity (though these molar formations, as constellations of desire, do matter), because subjectivity includes the feelings, beliefs, and desires of an individual that structure their way of being in the world, in addition to the social grouping we might ascribe to her or him. Literature and film's ability to interact with the real substance of people, impacting their desires and ways of understanding the world, conveys these arts into an immanent, material realm. The minor literature takes "men and women as part of its gears along with things, structures, metals, materials" in an immanent relation where the desire of the audience circulates with the materiality of the text, creating a 'social assemblage' (81). A novel may contain the qualities addressed here within its narrative – deterritorialization, collapsing of the public and private, and collective enunciation – such as the minor communities of J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (Holtmeier 2009). This is only significant, however, if real people enter into an assemblage with these writing-machines that produces real desires, ideas, and experiences. For this reason, the final value of any minor literature rests in its political efficacy and its power to affect audiences, a significant point for cinema as a mass-medium. I will now turn to *Cinema 2* in order to show how Deleuze uses this earlier work on minor literatures to inform his concept of a post-War cinematic politics.

Deleuze returns to these concepts in *Cinema 2,* his discussion mirrors these three aspects of the minor literature albeit in more filmic terms and with more emphasis on the representation of subjects in cinema. He begins by saying: "Resnais and the Straubs are probably the greatest political film-makers in the West, in modern cinema. But,

oddly, this is not through the presence of the people. On the contrary, it is because they know how to show how the people are what is missing" (Deleuze 1989, 215). Foregrounding his discussion of political cinema this way illustrates the importance of subjects to his understanding of cinema, and also the particular critical interest of political cinema: that the people are *missing.* While I will explain what it means for a people to be missing or not in relation to Algeria more specifically in the next chapter, Deleuze starts with the counter-example of Soviet Cinema, where there is a people even if they are tricked or repressed, such as in Eisenstein's *The General Line*/*Old and New* (1929) or *Ivan the Terrible* (1945). These films depict a 'classical politics' for Deleuze, because "the people are already there, real before being actual, ideal without being abstract. Hence the idea that the cinema, as art of the masses, could be the supreme revolutionary or democratic art, which makes the masses a true subject" (216). Deleuze's argument parallels Siegfried Kracauer and his critique of the Mass Ornament (Kracauer 1995), but focuses more specifically on the struggles of a people, rather than their abstraction in spectacle - "the twists and turns of class struggle and the confrontation of ideologies... economic crises, the fight against moral prejudice, profiteers and demagogues, which marks the awareness of a people" (216). In these examples, 'the people' can clearly be identified and classified as a (mostly) homogenous group struggling for a singular goal. This concept of the 'classical political cinema' is important, because it helps mark the shift from a politics based on conflict and dialectical movement to a contemporary politics based on the creation of peoples. Since the distinction between a classical and a modern politics is important to how I situate the films I address here, I will provide more concrete examples of classical political

cinema in the next chapter in relation to *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), and the way in which this film promotes a coherent Islamic-Algerian subject. The four points Deleuze turns to in *Cinema 2,* similar to those of minor literatures, include: the absence of homogenous peoples, the collapse of public and private boundaries, the proliferation of subjects and struggles, and a collective enunciation.

In many respects, these four points can be reduced to the prefiguration of a 'people to come'. If the homogenous unity of subjects cannot be represented, then what is depicted on screen? This point is clarified when Deleuze returns to minor literatures by saying: "No doubt this truth [that the people are missing] also applied to the West, but very few authors discovered it, because it was hidden by the mechanisms of power and the systems of majority" (217). In other words, constructs such as popular opinion, national identities, and classical politics impede either the people to come or the revelation that the people is missing, because they offer pre-determined ideas, peoples, and politics that are majoritarian in nature. In doing so, these majoritarian constructions restrict the creation of new ideas, peoples, and politics and rely instead on cliché. Similar to the way that the minor literature comes from within a majoritarian literature and deterritorializes it, as discussed above, Deleuze argues that "Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people" (217). The 'invention of a people' describes the process by which cinema creates a people to come. The explicit connection to minor literatures in this passage helps to clarify how Deleuze sees this process operating in relation to something like national identity: the people are

missing because national identities are no longer sufficient within the contemporary context to describe populations. These populations do not come from the outside, they come from within the nation, or already exist within the nation, while simultaneously breaking down the concept of a national identity due to, for example, transnational flows and networks. Whereas a 'missing people' suggests the lack of representation, I argue throughout this project that this void results in the biopolitical production of subjects in modern political cinemas, or the active fragmentation and Becoming of subjects. Through fragmentation and this kinesis of subjectivity, it becomes difficult to describe a static subject on screen, thereby suggesting that the people are missing, but also that their future coming is immanent to the materiality of the film (its subjects, mise-en-scene, its camera movements, etc.). As a result, I argue that modern political films, in turn, actually focus on the production of subjectivity itself, or subjects in the process of (trans)formation, which is the active arrival of a people on screen.

While the 'people to come' roughly described the way that modern political cinemas deterritorialize their filmic subjects, much the way that minor literatures deterritorialize languages, Deleuze's next point mirrors minor literatures by arguing that political cinemas collapse boundaries between public and private concerns. Again, Deleuze turns to his work with Guattari on Kafka: "Kafka suggested that 'major' literatures always maintained a border between the political and the private, however mobile, whilst, in minor literature, the private affair was immediately political and 'entailed a verdict of life or death'" (218). Similarly, in political cinema "the private affair merges with the social – or political – immediate" (218). As a result, seemingly private moments in

political cinemas cannot be separated from political exegesis. The modern political films I examine in this project are not always explicit about this collapse, sometimes it requires an understanding of the industrial or political context of a film, but I argue this results in the construction of politicized subjects even when dealing with seemingly existential registers. This results, for Deleuze, in the coexistence of the political and private "to the point of absurdity", which makes the private all the more recognizably political (218). Deleuze extends this point to include myth, suggesting that political cinemas connect myth to the present, revealing their politics (219). While he refers to archaic myths, I argue contemporary myths operating through majoritarian ideologies serve as fitting examples as well. From the myth of the communist state in China to the American Dream in the United States, which I address in chapter 3 and 4 respectively, the obfuscation on part of the myths cannot be separated from daily quotidian life in modern political films, which immediately politicize the seemingly private or quotidian acts of the subjects on screen. This collapse of the public and private, myth and daily life, contributes to the construction of a people to come by illustrating how the seemingly existential features of a film constitute a Becoming that entails a subtle diversion from majoritarian identities and politics.

The third quality of modern political cinemas operates through the fragmentation of subjects on screen, to the point where one can no longer speak of national subjects or homogenous peoples. Deleuze explains: "Acknowledging the failure of fusions or unifications which did not re-create a tyrannical unity, and did not turn back against the people, modern political cinema has been created on this fragmentation, this break-up"

(220). This point in particular helps explain why the people is missing, because this fragmentation makes it hard to speak of a 'people' at all. Instead, there are a multiplicity of peoples, each subject unique and not reducible to the whole. Speaking of 'black American cinema' after the 1970's, Deleuze explains this function by arguing that "instead of replacing a negative image of the black with a positive one, [black American cinema] multiplies types and 'characters', and each time creates or re-creates only a small part of the image which no longer corresponds to a linkage of actions, but shattered states of emotions or drives" (220). This fragmentation describes the process by which modern political films deterritorialize majoritarian subjects and national identities, but also illustrates the way that modern political cinemas are uniquely suited to presenting subjects on screen in working against cliché. The fragmentation of a homogenous people does not preclude the cooperation amongst a heterogeneous people, however, because for Deleuze a film constitutes a 'speech act' in which diverse subjects find a voice. By creating a rupture in the majoritarian discourse, modern political films allow room for a collective enunciation in speaking for potential subjects silenced by a dominant discourse. As a result, the fragmentation of subjects creates the potential for new or previously othered subjects to find political representation and therefore "produce[s] collective utterances as the prefiguration of the people who are missing", and creating a people to come by mobilizing subjects (224). These two points taken together, the fragmentation of the people and the production of 'collective utterances', take up the last function of the minor literature and its goal of creating collective enunciations. This similarity between political cinema and minor literatures is useful in illustrating the theoretical development of the concept in Deleuze's work, but I will turn

now to how Deleuze's thought on political cinema has already been applied in the field of Film Studies.

While D.N. Rodowick first discussed the minor cinema in his book *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* in 1997, there has been a swell in scholarly application of the concept to various cinemas from 2000-2010. These applications of the term have have resulted in identifiable trends, suggesting that minor cinemas are most useful in addressing issues of the nation, diaspora, and identity. I do not mean this to be a list that exhausts the possibilities of the minor cinema, but I believe it is highly indicative of the types of issues that are at stake in the theoretical underpinnings of minor cinemas. I will now turn to the scholarship that makes up these trends in order to explain why I focus on the biopolitical production of subjectivity in my own project. The three trends I address here are the critique of national cinemas, the depiction of diaspora, and the construction of minor-identities in film.

In the context of national cinemas, the minor has been used to examine how a minority voice can emerge from within a dominant cinematic discourse. Two examples that have been addressed through the analysis of minor cinemas are the people of Quebec within Canada, and the Scots within the United Kingdom. These are peoples who have nations that are not completely sovereign, but would still refer to themselves as Quebecois or Scottish. As a result, these identities are particularly interesting topics for films, and scholars such as Bill Marshall and Martin-Jones have used the concept of the minor to show how films negotiate concepts of national identity. Marshall uses the concept in

Quebec National Cinema (2001) to illustrate the difficulty in assigning the term national cinema, because of the variety of different films that are considered Quebecois. In relation to the difference between establishing a homogenous understanding of the Quebecois and a more innovative 'people to come', he explains the fragmentary nature of Quebecois cinema: “different tendencies in Quebec cinema have run the gamut of responses to this question” (Marshall 2001, 13). In a subsequent footnote, he illustrates an understanding “that certain uses of the word ‘minor’ run the risk of falling back into discourses of identity” (314). In other words, Marshall does not argue that the cinema of Quebec should be classified as a minor cinema, but uses it as a dichotomy from which to understand Quebecois productions in relation to other dominant regimes – Canadian identity, Canadian filmmaking, and Hollywood. In representing a ‘small nation’ as one that produces minor cinemas, Mette Hjort provides an example of what Marshall warns against in *Small Nation, Global Cinema: the New Danish Cinema* (2005). She too agrees that minor films “at some deep level involve an identity-based and loosely political intentionality on the part of their makers” (Hjort 2005, 259). Whereas Marshall illustrates the fragmentary nature of Quebecois cinema, however, Hjort shows how a small nation's cinema is popularized on a global scale, and in doing so reifies the concept of a Danish national cinema. This, I argue, starts to illustrate the reterritorialization that may eventually end up establishing another majoritarian discourse. Under the correct circumstances, however, a small nation within a nation can begin to produce minor filmmakers. While Marshall shows that for Quebec this resulted from modernization during the 1960’s, Martin-Jones, on the other hand, shows that a similar process resulted from devolution in Scotland in his article “*Orphans*, a Work of

Minor Cinema from Post-Devolutionary Scotland" (Martin-Jones, 2004). As Martin-Jones recounts, the break from centralized rule did not result in an immediate formation of a separate Scottish identity, but rather a minor position in which Scotland must regain its 'voice'. In other words, the Scottish people may now begin forming a distinct identity, but they begin with the deterritorialization of their relationship with Britain.

Diasporic cinemas are very different from this model. Diasporic cinemas center on characters or groups of people that have been displaced from their 'homeland' through political, social, economic, or religious struggle. As a result, diasporas produce films that struggle to understand notions of the homeland, diaspora communities abroad, and the host cultures where they now reside. These circumstances surrounding the diaspora experience mean direct recourse to a transcendental goal, people, or ideal often seems like an impossible task, if at all desirable. Laura U. Marks first provided an extended study of the minor in diaspora audiences in her book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000). In this text, she argues that a series of 'affects' create tactile experiences for diaspora viewers, often bringing them what are now impossible experiences. Highlighting 'intercultural cinema' as a trend within the broader category of transnational cinema, Marks proceeds in phenomenological fashion for much of her analysis, arguing that "All cinema is transnational in that its audience will not be able to decode its images perfectly... Intercultural cinema, however, takes these issues as its explicit subject" (Marks 2000, 93). These 'affects' have the potential to create a people, by operating as what Rodowick calls an 'enabling' image, bringing them in to being through their recognition of certain cinematic registers (Rodowick 1997,

141). Hamid Naficy quickly follows Marks, providing a less phenomenological account of diasporic cinemas in *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001). In a series of ‘close-ups’, Naficy provides readings of films that he calls 'accented cinemas'. Naficy explains his term:

> By its artisanal and collective mode of production, its critical juxtaposition of different worlds, languages, and cultures, and its aesthetics of imperfection and smallness, it critiques the dominant cinema... For these reasons, accented cinema is not only a minority cinema but also a minor cinema, in the way that Deleuze and Guattari have defined the concept. (Naficy 2001, 26)

Both Marks and Naficy’s projects illustrate that with globalization and the increasing difficulty in defining nationality, political films are turning away from representational politics as a form of critique. The intercultural cinema of Marks critiques through an embodied cinema, where the ‘skin of the film’ creates a *haptic experience* for certain filmgoers that are able to unearth the ‘fossils’ within the film. These viewers inhabit the i*nterstitial identity* Naficy describes as being a part of accented cinemas. In each case these interstitial identities are not served by traditional, or majoritarian, forms of representation, and are more likely to describe a 'people to come' than a newly formed subject.

Gender and queer politics are a third trend in the discussion of minor cinemas, as shown by writers such as Alison Butler and Martin-Jones. In *Women’s Cinema: The Contested Screen* (2002), Butler identifies the loosely bound term ‘women’s cinema’ as being relevant to a minor politics. Similarly, Martin-Jones argues that minor cinema defines a trajectory for queer cinema in *Deleuze Reframed* (2008). Each of these writers takes what they position as a minority identity as their topic, and examine films that negotiate

these identities. Butler, for example, points out the complicated situation for women in that they do not stand in an oppositional relationship with the male-dominated filmmaking environment, but a contentious relationship that is more complicated and contextual than binary understanding allows. For Butler, the distinction between major and minor that Deleuze and Guattari establish in their book on Kafka provides the impetus for her project: "The assumption of this book is that women's cinema is not 'at home' in any of the host cinematic or national discourses it inhabits, but that it is always an inflected mode, incorporating, reworking and contesting the conventions of established traditions" (Butler 2002, 22). While Butler's book does not necessarily add anything new to the discourse surrounding minor cinemas, she does provide a corpus of films, and theoretical justification, for the place of the minor within film studies. Martin-Jones turns to queer cinema to illustrate Deleuze's concept of the minor as applied to cinema. Martin-Jones presents sexual identity in *Mysterious Skin* (2004) is presented as 'molecular' – it may have identifiable traits, but ultimately each character's identity is impossible to reduce to a single term or idea. In the end, this is not just thematic for Martin-Jones, however, but also a part of "Araki's self-conscious cinematic style", which is used to "insert the film into a dialogue between filmmaker, fictional story and audience" (Martin-Jones 2008, 61). The presentation of molecular subjects and dialogue between story and audience results in a process-based understanding of these subjects as a people in formation. These identity-based analyses using the concept of the minor are particularly strong, because, similar to the diaspora politics discussed previously, the identities they attempt to examine have no standard definition. These presentations may even include problematic identities that have yet to be identified, but

can still be thought through film, as Gary Genosko identifies in regards to ‘anti-psychiatry’ in *Felix Guattari: A Critical Introduction* (2009). For Guattari, film, especially popular film, “held promise because of the potential publics they catalyzed, which, Guattari hoped, would make new demands on the dominant commercial film industry to deliver radically different messages” (Genosko 2009, 157). Thus minor cinemas have the potential to identify even more radically marginalized, molecular peoples, by making minor use of mainstream media, a point that I have taken up elsewhere in relation to the mobilization of subjects by *Avatar* (Holtmeier 2010).

The research cited above is not exhaustive, but illustrates the trends in the application of minor literatures to cinema as belonging to questions of national identity, diaspora, and gender or queer politics. Regardless of which larger project the research belongs to, the philosophical project of the minor always points towards a molecular identity, whether a ‘people to come’ or an identity based on the impossibility of cohesion. Due to this function of minor cinemas, which the modern political film borrows, I focus on the biopolitical production of cinematic subjectivity in my own project. In some respects, this approach is similar to the identity-based approach identified previously, but differs in that it focuses more explicitly on the fragmentation of subjectivity against social, political, cultural, and economic forces trying to contain it. As Adam Szymanski points out, “Though there is a political potentiality to identity politics, and any truly politicized cinema must be sensitive to gains made through these avenues of struggle, identity also has its limits and minor cinema must not be qualified solely as a cinema of minority identities” (Szymanski 2011). In this regard, I borrow Michel Foucault's concept of

biopower and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of biopolitical production. Foucault's concept of biopower helps to explain how and why majoritarian subjectivities are identified and reproduced, whereas Hardt and Negri's biopolitical production provides a way to understand how subjects are produced on screen, useful for understanding how the fragmentation of subjectivity in modern political films can serve productive ends. Furthermore, subjectivity replaces identity, as I mentioned previously, as a key term to illustrate the way that subjects are both products of the discourses that contain them, but may exceed them as well. While this is arguably true of identity, subjectivity takes on an important ontological or existential layer, important for the films in this project that discuss the daily banality of life, labor, and experience. I will now turn to concepts of biopower and biopolitical production in order to explain my focus on the construction and deconstruction of cinematic subjectivity as a core facet of political cinema.

Biopolitical Production and Cinematic Subjectivity

In this section, I will address my focus on subjectivity and the concept of biopolitical production in more depth, in addition to how it differs from the negative concept of *biopower* in Foucault's work. I will then illustrate the significance of biopolitical production in relation to how the intolerable in cinema mobilizes the creation of new subjectivities. These features together show how modern political films *politicize* or *mobilize* subjects. As Pisters argues from a neurological perspective, "images *as images*... operate on the mind, can change our perception, and are therefore a 'political player'" (Pisters 2012, 220). In doing so, they do not just create new political communities or people to come, but instead offer new ways of seeing and being in the

world. The greater argument of this project is, in turn, that the critical mode of modern political films comes from the active production of subjectivity on screen, which promotes these news ways of being in the world.

To explain how my focus on modern political films differs from the scholars I cited previously, it will be useful to explain the transition from biopower to biopolitical production. The difference between these two terms is important, because biopower is ultimately a negative term, whereas biopolitical production has generative potential. In Foucault's original formulation, biopower was a term used to explain how nations and governments regulate populations in order to exploit their productive capacities or form ideal subjects. In his 1976 lectures at the College de France, Foucault distinguishes between two biological registers of power: that of disciplinarity and that of regulatory power (Foucault 2004, 242-243). Disciplinarity, he explains, is a product of 'institutions' whereas regulation is a function of the state. The former treats the body as a source of *capacities,* which might be exploited for profit or must be contained because they are dangerous: "[disciplinarity] centers on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile" (Foucault 2004, 249). This concept of power is the same that was popularized by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish,* and illustrates the process by which individuals are required to conform to an ideal subject in classical political cinemas. In the first chapter of this project, I will use the examples of *Battle of Algiers* and *Outside the Law* (2010), where subjects are actively individuated to produce an effective revolution(ary) - by actively, I mean that the subjects are individuated by the formal features of these films,

but also that the viewer witnesses individuation as the subject of the film. This individuation does not take place within a Foucauldian institution, however, but within much more mobile assemblages that control its formation. As Deleuze argues, “the disciplines underwent a crisis to the benefit of new forces that were gradually instituted and which accelerated after World War II: a disciplinary society was what we already no longer were, what we had ceased to be” (Deleuze 1992, 3). In other words, the disciplinary powers of the institution have been freed from the confines of the school, the prison, the hospital, etc. They now operate as “ultrarapid forms of free-floating control that replaced the old disciplines operating in the time frame of a closed system” (4). This does not mean Focault's insight regarding the formation of subjectivity is unimportant, only that it has increasingly taken more rapid, complex forms post-World War Two, according to Deleuze, and within the context of increasingly globalization that I outline above. In the modern political film, the formation of subjects provides the backdrop for the struggles of every character who faces a majoritarian regime that attempts to harness these regulatory measures.

The second side of biopower concerns more the regulation of populations through state intervention and/or policies. Foucault argues, "we also have a second technology which is centered not upon the body but upon life: a technology which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass" (Foucault 2004, 249). This second technology concerns statistics such as birth rates, mortality rates, spread of disease, life expectancy, and other health concerns. He calls this a technology of 'security' - in other words, a

method in which the state regulates and reassures its population. These are still concerns of the body and biological functions and, as a result, a biopolitical concern. This question of populations enters into the modern political films where censorship and majoritarian signifying regimes are established, both within the narratives of films and the extra-filmic context of production. For example, *Bab El-Oued City,* in my first chapter, addresses the efforts of Islamic fundamentalists to regulate a city's population within the narrative of the film itself, whereas in my second chapter film regulators in Iran carefully control what types of subjects are allowed in Iranian film. These direct attempts to form 'societies of control' are mirrored more subtly in chapter three and four, which focus more explicitly on the production of economies. In these latter chapters, the mechanisms of control become more diffuse, forming something more akin to Adorno's 'culture industry' as addressed earlier. Furthermore, Adorno's argument that the 'culture industry' produces ideal subjects for its own perpetuation – subjects that desire to see a certain type of cinema, spend their time a certain way, and labor so that they may do so – provides an example of how societies of control wield biopower in the realm of the arts to maintain a generous market. Like Adorno's example of the young woman on a date, who acts according to supposed societal norms, biopower operates on and structures subjectivities in service of naturalized clichés (Adorno 2002, 136). These naturalized clichés are important to understanding the political importance of the intolerable in the modern political film.

As mentioned previously, Foucault qualifies the separation between these two registers of biopower by arguing that they actually exist simultaneously. He says: "the two sets of

mechanisms... are not mutually exclusive and can be articulated with each other" (Foucault 2004, 250). Furthermore, the macro and micro views of biopower here share an important feature: 'the norm'. The concept of normality lies at the heart of Foucault's political critique and is a core feature of disciplinary and regulatory functions, as well as Deleuze's societies of control. He explains: "The norm is something that can be applied to both a body one wishes to discipline and a population one wishes to regularize" (Foucault 2004, 253). The 'norm' is important to Foucault's political critique because it illustrates how 'racism' enters into questions of biopolitics. This racism can be, but is not confined to, questions of race and skin color. Racism, for Foucault, is a more basic question of "the break between what must live and what must die", which is not always a question of murder, but also "political death, expulsion, rejection" (Foucault 2004, 254, 256). This most fully illustrates why biopower, in the way Foucault articulates it, is a negative concept. For him, it is inherently racist and largely a concern of regulation and the creation of productive individuals in service of the state (or institution), and even the disavowal or reformation of non-productive subjects. Deleuze mirrors this concern by explaining Guattari's science-fictional imagination, where the movement and access of individuals would be delimited by an electronic key-card system in the societies of control, micro-managing the 'norm' for each individual (Deleuze 1992, 7). In the modern political film, characters continually run up against and come into conflict with this negative concept of biopower. Albeit an abstract concept, it is possible to see how the ways of living of particular characters in these films are not the *correct* ways of living based on attempts to regulate populations for political, religious, or economic agendas.

Although Deleuze's societies of control follow Foucault's negative conception of biopower, it is important to note that he has also tried to recuperate biopolitics for productive purposes. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari return to bodily metaphors (though, they would argue these are not metaphors at all) in their concept of the 'Body without Organs' [BwO]. The BwO is the body or subject subordinated by the biopower Foucault articulates, but, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, there are ways out of or around the negative forces imposed upon the body. Through outlining an active practice of careful experimentation, Deleuze and Guattari allow the subject an element of agency, which is missing from Foucault's project. This move from Foucault to Deleuze and Guattari is important, because it is also a move from negative concepts of biopower to productive concepts of biopower, which have been taken up in more recent scholarship by authors such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. One might point out the progression between *Empire* (2001), their first work together, and *Multitude* (2005), their second. In their first project, they outline a 'global power' they call Empire, which largely promulgates the interests of the wealthy and large conglomerates independent of any nation similar to Deleuze's societies of control. As part of the larger neoliberal project, one can connect Empire to the forced migrations of populations and other disciplinary functions of biopower. In their second project, however, they begin to illustrate a concept of the Multitude, which is a grassroots reclamation of 'what is common' from Empire. Part of Multitude's power comes from the way it is a fragmented, and yet cooperative, whole similar to OWS, and thus eludes regulatory measures. This fragmentation comes through a positive concept of biopower that Hardt

and Negri call *biopolitical production*.

Foucault notes fragmentation already at work within the wielding of biopower. He identifies this fragmentation with the racism inherent in the normalization discussed previously. He argues: "That is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower" (Foucault 2004, 255). This fragmentation, however, is between political classes and works to 'purify' a population, providing it security (Foucault 2004, 255). I argue that this is the domain of classical politics, however: to fragment, and to create opposition between factions. Each of these factions are cohesive populations, or peoples with coherent histories, religions, and cultures that can come into conflict with one another. For writers such as Carl Schmitt, this is the basis for a concept of politics, a point which I will emphasize in my first chapter. There is another type of fragmentation that can exceed this control and categorization. The modern political film illustrates this process, which is based upon the proliferation of identities, subjects, and ways of being in the world that are not immediately compatible with a particular faction or ideology. This is the project of Hardt and Negri identify with Multitude, and it differs from Foucault's racist fragmentation in the sense that it allows an element of agency, as with the BwO, as opposed to being forced upon an individual from above, and it permits cooperative relations amongst differing individuals as opposed to the construction of lines of conflict. The process in which this productive fragmentation occurs for Hardt and Negri is biopolitical production, which, within modern political films, provides a positive notion of how biopower interacts with cinematic subjectivity.

Biopolitical production opposes biopower as an active process of producing something *new* rather than maintaining order. In other words, it no longer draws upon the regulatory function Foucault identifies with biopower, but utilizes the disciplinary function to create new subjects. Foucault's critique of the normalizing function of biopower is important, but biopolitical production overflows the normalization of biopower through producing a Multitude of types. Hardt and Negri illustrate this process by highlighting a progression in guerilla warfare. They argue that pre-1968, guerillas were relegated to the countryside and traditional military operations were their goal. Post-1968, guerillas moved to the city and took up a different political project of the production of subjectivity. They explain: “It was not just a matter of 'winning hearts and minds,' in other words, but rather of *creating new hearts and minds* through the construction of new circuits of communication, new forms of social collaboration, and new modes of interaction” (Hardt and Negri 2005, 81; italics added). In other words, this new revolutionary action was no longer based on antagonizing an opponent, but of creating a new way of life altogether. Biopolitical production is not limited to guerilla warfare, however, and I argue that the creation of alternative subjectivities is also the political project of the modern political films. For Hardt and Negri, biopolitical production is important, because it has the potential to mobilize what they call Multitude towards a form of cooperation. While a diffuse concept in Hardt and Negri's work, the Multitude can be described as the unmediated masses: not the unified 'people' of a nation, but the individuals with all of their diversity that make up the population. This is an increasingly important concept considering increasing diversity due to

transnational migrations in the post-colonial context, but also the increasing diversity of intra-national subjectivities as communications technologies encourage the fragmentation of subjectivity through revealing alternative (to the nation) networks of affiliation. Despite the diversity of the Multitude, Hardt and Negri claim that it is possible to articulate something that the Multitude can hold in common – not a universal, but instead agreed-upon values proper to each singular-individual in the Multitude. The role of biopolitical production in creating this 'common' is that it "constantly creates a new social being, a new human nature" appropriate to the well-being of all individuals in the Multitude rather than keeping the 'people' in a form of homeostasis (Hardt and Negri 2006, 248). In modern political films, the viewer witnesses this biopolitical production taking place.

While the ways that biopolitical production can take place on screen are numerous, the presentation of what is intolerable to a people is a feature common to the modern political films I focus on here. The question of what is 'intolerable' helps to elucidate how these films work politically, without the dialectical operation Carl Schmitt would argue is requisite for political film. In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze argues that a film's ethical value is based on its ability to construct a *belief in the world,* and elsewhere I have illustrated how Deleuze distinguishes between films with characters that follow a morality or pre-determined/disciplined choice from films with characters that "choose to choose" or choose choice itself (Holtmeier 2010). Ronald Bogue describes this as producing in the individual "belief in the possibilities of the world," which affords the individual the ability to change the world by recognizing how it could possibly be

different (Bogue 2010). This belief resists the homeostasis Foucault identifies in the normalizing function of biopower, but something is required to mobilize the individual, or to make the individual *believe* (in the world, and one's power to change it). For Deleuze, events that are *intolerable* to subjects constitute this event. Speaking of Glauber Rocha, and third cinema more generally, Deleuze says that certain films "isolate a lived present... which could be intolerable, the unbelievable, the impossibility of living now in 'this' society" (Deleuze 1989, 222). The intolerable nature of societies portrayed in such films prompts the individuals to attempt to change their environments for the better – at least, that is Deleuze's hope. As mentioned previously, Deleuze suggests political cinemas can be identified by their 'lack of a people' – that is, their lack of a population conforming to a stable identity – but he also argues that they are marked by their creation of a people to come. I contend that this a way for Deleuze to integrate his interests in creativity and the creation of new thought in resistance to biopolitical homeostasis while remaining attentive to the specifics of each political context at hand. With this in mind, I suggest that the recognition of the intolerable in films is a way of mobilizing biopolitical production in order to postulate a future-oriented politics based not on revolution, but the creation of a people, which suggests a non-determinate futurity (future-oriented, without being dialectical). More importantly, I want to suggest it engenders a pro-filmic futurity as viewers see these films, witness these intolerables alongside the characters in the films, and are affected by this feature of these films. If this is true, these films potentially draw their viewers into the biopolitical production being depicted on screen. It is not new to say that the viewer becomes 'sutured' to the film in terms of its formal operation (Baudry 1985, Mulvey 1975, Oudart 1990, and

Silverman 1983), but modern political films also have the potential to suture the identities of viewers with identities on screen in a mutual becoming-political. The pro-filmic effects of these films may be subtle in general, but it is worth mentioning how they might be used in larger political projects, such as the way Bahman Ghobadi released *Nobody Knows About Persian Cats* (2009) online in Iran to view for free. By releasing this film for free to the audience the film depicts, his motivations can only be to engender this type of political mobilization.

The Modern Political Film in a Global Context

I divide this project into three overlapping sections organized around the majoritarian discourses that structure subjectivity in the films I analyze: the first half, chapters one and two, focuses on the contexts of Algeria and Iran, and both address ways in which Islamic identity is mobilized for revolutionary purposes; the second half, chapters three and four, shifts to global capitalism as it is introduced in China and enforced in the United States, as well as the shifting subject-positions that come with this economic program. While Harvey acknowledges a connection between the resistance/acquiescence to global neoliberalism and the use of religion as a way to create social solidarity, the films I examine largely elide this greater argument (Harvey 2005, 171). To this end, I emphasize thinking through these contemporary films that focus on cinematic subjectivity, rather than applying an overarching theory to all modern political films. Chapter two and three, the third pairing, focus on censorship. This is an important point to take note of, because the political project of 'creating a people' involves promoting plurality, whereas censorship is used to restrict to proliferation of identities and desires. This dichotomy, between proliferation and

restriction, is a core feature of the modern political film: in every case a diverse population overflows the coding of a majoritarian regime, but it comes up against the wielding of biopower by a dominant force (the state, a religious majority, an ideology, a community, etc.). I have chosen these particular contexts, because of the insistence of filmmakers to focus on subjectivity in their films, and, as I argue, the way these films actively produce subjectivity on screen. There are certainly other films and media contexts that would be ripe for discussion as modern political films, such *The French Democracy* (2005), a French machinima about race-riots in France, as I have argued elsewhere with William Brown, but I have limited this study to an interrelated set of factors in order to focus my approach (Brown and Holtmeier 2013).

In my first chapter, I return to the classic example of political film, *Battle of Algiers,* because it is exemplary of the features I suggest are untenable in post-1990 political cinema: namely the formation of clear class boundaries as lines of conflict. Aside from the film's popularity as an example of political cinema, the immediately post-World War Two context of *Battle of Algiers* situates the film amongst the transitional period I discuss, where the modern political cinema and its fragmentation of cinematic identities increasingly replaces dialectical or revolutionary cinema. While *Battle of Algiers* gives an analytic account of the events that led to revolution in Algeria, Rachid Bouchareb's *Outside the Law* serves as a modern rendition, even contestation, of the same events, albeit with a focus on the struggles inside France. This modern retelling of anti-colonial struggle critiques arguments regarding the coherent identities of revolutionary subjects taking part in the bid for an independent Algeria. Despite this critique of the older film's

politics and its status as a post-1990 film, *Outside the Law* still focuses on a historical moment (in the past) rather than a contemporary political context. For an example of the modern political film within the Algerian context, I turn to Merzak Allouache's *Bab El-Oued City.* This more recent film addresses Algeria's difficult movement towards democracy in the 1990's, including the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and political violence on part of the military dictatorship. Amongst these political struggles, the film highlights growing global networks amongst the population of the Bab El-Oued neighborhood, which influence the desires and ways of living in the contemporary Algeria. These networks erode the efficacy of either the fundamentalists or the dictatorship to mobilize citizens towards revolutionary action.

While critics have looked to *Battle of Algiers* as the ideal example of third cinema (Stam 1985), others argue that its formal features elaborate more nuanced aesthetic and economic strategies that span the political modes of first, second, and third cinema, which Pisters argues has given the film a political afterlife as it contributes to later political struggle and military action (Wayne 2001 and Pisters 2012). These formal modes are relevant to the film's political status, but I focus more explicitly on the treatment of cinematic subjectivity in the film in order to examine the role of oppositional conflict in more traditional forms of political cinema. *Battle of Algiers* constructs this conflict formally and thematically in the film, through the construction of screen space, by depicting the mobilization of subjects, and its dialectical view of conflict that progresses according to the sensory-motor schemata. All of these features of the film work to separate and define two opposing peoples, which enables the

potential for politics according to Carl Schmitt (Schmitt 2007). Schmitt's argument is significant in this regard, because it explains why film that relies on traditional class struggles and dialectical conflict provides such an immediately political experience for the spectator. Namely, that it is only under these conditions that the revolutionary event is possible.

Rachid Bouchareb intervenes in the discussion *Battle of Algiers* begins regarding cinematic subjectivity through his film *Outside the Law.* This later film argues that the identity-building assemblages of *Battle of Algiers* are not as effective or clear cut as this earlier film suggests by fragmenting the idea of a pure revolutionary subject. While largely a first cinema film, *Outside the Law* begins to break down the notion of a homogenous people through the three brothers in the film. Each brother loosely corresponds to one of the cinematic 'modes' of first, second, and third cinema. One brother mimics Ali's status as a revolutionary from *Battle of Algiers,* inhabiting the role of third cinema, another is wrought by personal conflict between his newborn child and political ideology, taking on the private register of second cinema, and the last brother cares mostly about training the next champion boxer, a narrative arc suiting a first cinema film. Though the film itself does not vary to this degree formally, this difference between the brothers illustrates the way that attitudes towards political projects have shifted since *Battle of Algiers*. Though the vastly different contexts of production complicate how one might understand the difference between these representations of the same conflict, I argue that the latter film revises understandings of the post-World War Two context and reveals networks taking part in the production of subjectivity.

Finally, I turn to Merzak Allouache's *Bab El-Oued City,* which delves into the daily lives of individuals in the Bab El-Oued neighborhood of Algiers amongst conflict between rising Islamic fundamentalism and the violent repression of the military dictatorship. While dealing with explicitly political issues – the potential emergence of democracy in Algeria and socio-economic issues more generally – the film illustrates the impossibility for cohesive revolutionary action on the part of any constituent due to the formation of global networks amongst the population of Bab El-Oued. This third film again addresses the attempt to discipline a population, but the attempts continually fail and the conflict produces no dialectical movement. Instead, the stuttering narrative ends inconclusively with several characters leaving Algiers to go abroad. This ending constructs a sense of messianic time, opposed to the dialectical sensory-motor schemata of both *Battle of Algiers* and *Outside the Law.* This new time reflects the prevalence of global networks and impossibility of traditional revolution.

In chapter two, the national film industry of Iran constitutes the subject-creating assemblage. Due to the 1979 Revolution in Iran, an Islamic-Iranian identity became the standard national subject in Iranian film, enforced through specific requirements placed on film, post-production censorship, and funding schemes controlled by a religious elite. While the New Iranian Cinema, films emerging soon after the 1979 Revolution, has been lauded by critics for its poetic qualities – some critics, such as Hamid Naficy, illustrate how these qualities derive directly from the restrictions themselves – post-1979 developments also bear directly on the construction of cinematic subjectivity. In

some films, this results in a seeming depoliticization, since regulations and censorship diminish the potential representation of conflict amongst differing subjects. Over time, filmmakers have emerged who challenge this homogeneity of subjects in their films, however, including Jafar Panahi and Bahman Ghobadi. In this chapter, I focus on the 'ethnic' filmmaker Bahman Ghobadi who fragments the notion of a singular Iranian national subject by revealing networks of subjectivity outside of official representation despite the attempts of the Iranian state to discipline these Other subjects.

I begin by looking at Ghobadi's *Half-Moon,* a film that follows a group of Kurdish musicians traveling to a freedom concert in Iraq after the death of Saddam Hussein. Through travel, musical celebrity, and Kurdish tradition, the film constructs a Kurdish bio-network that overflows and thereby fragments notions of a particular Iranian national subject. *Half-Moon* is attentive to the restrictions placed on these 'ethnic' subjects, however, and illustrates their inability to proclaim their status as sovereign subjects through sound situations that punctuate and fragment the film. The sound situations rupture linear time in short scenes that glimpse into a the future of the film. Unfortunately for the protagonist, these future-scenes depict the character's own death. These sound situations culminate in a freedom concert, which takes place after the death of the protagonist and cannot be depicted as a result. From within the character's coffin, viewers hear the sounds of the concert, however, suggesting the continued operation of a Kurdish bio-network that cannot be completely delimited by the Iranian state.

While one might argue *Half-Moon* sets up an oppositional relationship between Iranian

subjects and their ethnic Other, the inability to represent such an oppositional relationship, due to sound situations, mitigates the potential for the re-emergence of a Schmittian politics. Ghobadi moves further way from an oppositional politics in his next film, *Nobody Knows About Persian Cats.* Set in Tehran, this later film no longer focuses on Kurdish subjects exclusively, but instead acknowledges the fragmentation of an Iranian national subject within Tehran itself through similar formal strategies including sound situations in the form of music videos. I argue that Ghobadi advances his previous political project further in this later film by showing how bio-networks constructed by the Kurds also form within the musical communities of Tehran. As a result, despite charges that Ghobadi is a 'rural' filmmaker, he forwards a political strategy through several communities in Iran that resists constructing anOther identity that seeks to repeat the events of 1979.

In chapter three, Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers have faced similar constraints on their filmmaking to their Iranian counterparts, including difficult circumstances in state-run studios and censorship. In the early 90's, young Chinese directors decided to make independent films in order to circumvent the studio system, which privileged a set of older, established directors. In doing so, they brought new images and formal strategies to Chinese film with their focus on the quotidian experiences of Chinese citizens in urban settings. After avoiding the state-run system, however, their films were censored by the People's Republic of China (PRC). In this chapter I focus on the films of Jia Zhangke in particular, because of his interest in documenting the effects of economic reform in China. In his banned films, such as *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown*

Pleasures he focuses on the discrepancy between 'official' messages of economic progress and the lived examples of individual Chinese citizens. Through their use of post-socialist realist time, these films construct seer-like characters that bear witness to economic modernization in China and report these discrepancies to real world viewers. Through circulation in film clubs, bars, and university screenings, these films take part in the production of a critical network of cinephiles who discuss these films, not unlike the original film-events of third cinema. Despite the critical assemblage they construct, these films do not create a revolutionary environment due to the satus of 'seers' in these films and the use of post-socialist realist time – a term I derive from Jason McGrath and Chris Berry's analysis of post-socialist realism. Rather than revolutionary action, these films promote a form of witnessing. While Jia was eventually invited back into the state-run studio system in China, I argue he continues these critiques in films such as *The World* and *24 City.*

Jia's earlier films focus on the collateral effects of rapid economic modernization on urban youths. *Xiao Wu* creates a dichotomy between two subjects: one representative of pre-global economic activity, a local pickpocket, the other an idealized capitalist who exports cigarettes, but also runs a brothel. While either might be called a criminal, the pickpocket is criminalized as a leftover from pre-capitalist times whereas the capitalist is championed as the 'business man' appropriate to China's increasing economic growth and new economies emerging from market reform. Depicting relatively banal events, post-socialist realist time in the film disconnects sensory-motor relations and serves to counter the dominant myths that idealize capitalist growth perpetrated by the PRC.

Rather than establishing a dialectical movement where the proper subject replaces the other, this 'realist' time illustrates how both subjects persist, as the pickpocket becomes a seer-like figure. The witnessing of the seer-figure is compounded in the end of the film, which turns non-actors passing by into a network of seers. *Unknown Pleasures* focuses more explicitly on the impotence of urban youths in the face of rapid economic modernization. Without the ability to act upon their surroundings, the protagonists of this film also become seers as they wander changing (semi)urban environments. Eventually, unable to act, the young protagonists of the film try to construct a causal narrative for themselves by robbing a bank. This unsuccessful act illustrates the complete inability for these youths to take part in the economic reform rapidly reconstructing the city around them and prefigures the local/global divide in Jia's later films.

Seeking a larger audience for his films, Jia eventually re-entered the state-run studio system in China. Despite claims to the contrary, Jia's desire for a larger domestic audience suggests political motivation considering the already formidable global circulation of his films. His first film after being unblacklisted, *The World*, takes place in a theme park in Beijing that contains miniatures of various wonders from around the world. While not as deliberately paced as his previous films, *The World*'s depiction of the daily life and labor of the theme park's staff creates the same seemingly meandering (lack of) narrative. The witnessing this pre-hodological focus engenders reveals a divide between the more well-off theme park staff and migratory workers who come to Beijing seeking work. Though the migratory workers initiate a global, or at least regional,

movement by coming to Beijing, this film examines the local/global divide critically by illustrating how they are abused by these global flows. In doing so, the film bears witness to the way economic globalization in China results in a negative form of biopower that separates and relegates populations to particular, and particularly dangerous, forms of labor.

The final chapter turns to the United States and what I call Contemporary American Realist Cinema. While the United States is often associated with Hollywood, I argue another set of films has emerged in the late 2000's in response to the global economic crisis. This realist cinema counters the glossy, ideologically captivating nature of many Hollywood films, particular in relation to depictions of the American Dream. I use *The Pursuit of Happyness* as an example of a film that propagates the American Dream as a feasible desire if one just works hard enough. While dreams of economic success have largely come to define what the American Dream represents for citizens and immigrants in the United States, I show that this is a contemporary post-Cold War phenomenon, and that the term was initially coined to define the cooperative network of individuals working in common. Hollywood films such as *The Pursuit of Happyness* promote particular ideologies through teleological narratives that construct a cause and effect relationship between hard work and success. Contemporary American Realist Cinema, on the other hand, depicts the more arbitrary nature of reality through a less teleological understanding of time. Similar to Jia's films, they depict the daily, banal experiences of their protaganists, and promote the emergence of seer-like figures within their narratives. In the films of Ramin Bahrani, an Iranian-American director exemplar of

Contemporary American Realist Cinema, immanent-seers emerge when the American Dream is revealed to be a broken cliche.

After looking to *The Pursuit of Happyness* to provide an example of a film that endorses the American Dream, I turn to Ramin Bahrani's first commercial feature, *Man Push Cart. Man Push Cart* focuses on a network of Pakistani immigrants in New York City, and working class laborers more generally. This film counters the contemporary myth of the American Dream by invoking a Sisyphean time rather than a teleological narrative of progress and success. The film follows a pushcart vendor in New York who is saving up money to purchase his own pushcart. After finally purchasing his own cart, however, he immediately loses it, stripping him of his dream and putting him back where he started in the beginning of the film. In this way, the organization of time in the film, but also the role of labor itself, becomes Sisyphean in nature. By stripping the protagonist of the ability to act, the film suggests that he becomes a seer. Bahrani's film expands upon those of Jia, however, by suggesting that the seer-status of these characters allows them to form an immanent relationship with their environments, rather than one overcoded by popular ideologies.

Bahrani's next film*, Chop Shop,* focuses on similar issues of ideology and labor, this time set in the Iron Triangle, an assemblage of autobody shops. The protagonist of *Chop Shop* also has goals of financial security and success, the American Dream, but similarly runs up against insurmountable issues along the way. These setbacks eventually deny linear progression towards the protagonist's goal of owning a food truck, and reveal the

American Dream as a broken cliché. This revelation, however, produces a new subject in the protagonist unclouded by the American Dream. Without this overarching ideology, this character produces new relationships with the individuals around him. Ultimately, this suggests a ethico-political turn towards a belief in the world, not through the triumph of one ideology over another, but as the production of subjectivity itself.

These modern political films present a turn away from previous forms of political rhetoric that construct molar subjectivities, and focus, instead, on subject-positions outside of mainstream discourse. This may explain why for Guattari 'existence' is 'hardly even livable'. It might be more accurate to say that the ways of living perpetuated through the myriad of components that make up (mainstream) discourses cannot attend to the unique specificity of life, even as they attempt to constrain and direct living. In certain contexts, such as those addressed in this project, the difference between the actual lives of subjects and the 'control' perpetrated by these discourses becomes intolerable. This leads characters to act: to depart, to die, to steal, and to fight respectively. While none of these acts are *solutions* – they do not reconstitute a dialectical or sensory-motor moment where the action leads to a changed situation – they reveal the intolerable to viewers of these films, prompting the potential mobilization of (politicized) subjectivity. Most viewers of these films likely do not even consider them political films, but in subtly exampling the biopolitical production of cinematic subjectivity, they have the potential to fragment majoritarian discourses, viewer by viewer.

From *Battle of Algiers* to *Bab El-Oued City*: Merzak Allouache's Elegy for Democracy

While I showed the genesis of the modern political film in the concept of the 'minor' in the last chapter, I will now turn to its specific articulation in *Cinema 2*. As I mentioned briefly in the introductory chapter, Deleuze identifies what he calls the modern political cinema as one end on a spectrum that hinges on the cohesion of subjects within films. In this chapter, I will address both the classical and modern sides of this spectrum to illustrate the importance of a shift from classical politics to modern politics for describing contemporary political cinemas. While Deleuze speaks of the tradition of third cinema in relation to these concepts, and certain third cinema filmmakers such as Glauber Rocha, I argue in this chapter that situating Deleuze's thought amidst the third cinema thinkers requires a more nuanced understanding of third cinema. In other words, the vastly different political projects third cinema films belong to reveal a continuum that may be aligned with the treatment of cinematic subjects as either homogenous and revolutionary or with a diversity that reveals minoritarian positions. Paying attention to the specific representational strategies of these films illustrates that what is at stake is not a distinction between first and third cinema or second and third cinema, but a particular trend of cinematic politics oft situated with third cinema – though their location in third cinema films is by no means necessary, as the rest of this project will show.

Classical and modern politico-cinematic methods exist in a flux of film practices, meaning it is slightly disingenuous to isolate either of them in a 'pure' state. In order to begin this project with a useful comparison of these political modes, however, in this

chapter I focus on the context of Algeria by looking at three films about Algeria that operate according to political modes on this spectrum. While none of these films could be given a strict national designation *as* Algerian – due to transnational directors, funding, and post-colonial identities – they all attend to the colonial past of France and the role it played in constructing subjects. To illustrate the differences in these political modes, I trace the passage from a classical political film, *Battle of Algiers* (1966), to a modern political film, *Bab El-Oued City* (1994). By way of transition, I address the more recent *Outside the Law* (2010) by Rachid Bouchareb, which blurs the lines between these two political modes as a film that attempts to reimagine the events of *Battle of Algiers* from within France. Examining these films together illustrates the vastly different political projects they propose, and the way each highlights subject creation and transformation. The classical political film, on one hand, reifies conflict amongst peoples on the screen in an attempt to establish a dialectical, revolutionary conflict between peoples. The modern political film, on the other hand, attests to their fragmentation and inability to operate according to politics based on ethnic and religious solidarity.

In *Cinema 2*, Gilles Deleuze makes a distinction between the *classical political cinema* and *the modern political cinema* that pivots between the strong, coherent presence of a people in the classical political cinema, and the lack thereof in the modern political cinema. He describes this distinction by saying, "in classical cinema, the people are there, even though they are oppressed, tricked, subject, even though blind or unconscious... if there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the

people no longer exist, or not yet . . . *the people are missing*" (Deleuze 1989, 216). Though modern political cinemas, for Deleuze, lack a cohesive group of people with a clear identity, he also suggests that this allows rooms for a 'people to come', an emerging subjectivity that is in the process of being shaped in and by the film. As a result, this modern politics is similar to the action called for by many of the third cinema manifestos (Espinosa 1979, Rocha 1995, and Solanas and Getino 1997) that argue for the creation of an alternative to the hegemony of Hollywood and other (neo)colonial cinemas. In other words, these manifestos call for an alternative space where a new subject can emerge. Deleuze privileges this quality of films from the third world when he says, "As a general rule, third world cinema has this aim: through trance or crisis, to constitute an assemblage which brings real parties together, in order to make them produce collective utterances as the prefiguration of the people who are missing" (Deleuze 1989, 224). While it is true that the attributes Deleuze aligns with the modern political cinema do emerge in films categorized as third cinema, I would also point out that so do the attributes of the classical political cinema. In order to illustrate the formation of these political modes within the discourse of third cinema, I will turn to the manifestos of Julio Garcia Espinosa, Glauber Rocha, and Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino.

I locate my case studies for examining the difference between classical and modern political cinemas in films about Algeria, because of the prominence of *Battle of Algiers* as a locus of political film. *Battle of Algiers* narrates the anti-colonial struggle lead by the Algerian people against French colonizers, and posits a revolutionary dialectic

between the French and Algerian peoples. I then turn to *Outside the Law*, which retells the events of this anti-colonial struggle from within France. Finally, I move to *Bab El-Oued City*, which examines the quotidian and existential experiences of individuals living in the Bab el-Oued neighborhood of Algiers immediately after the military coup of 1991 and amidst the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. As a result, these films together are deeply influenced by colonialism, postcolonialism, and the mobilization of religion as a form of biopower. Each film, in turn, also addresses an increasingly globalized world, starting with *Battle of Algiers*, which acknowledges the United Nations, but does not depict any aspects of this globalization other than the French colonial project. *Bab El-Oued City*, on the other end of the spectrum, addresses the increasing fragmentation of identity in the era of globalization as individuals cross borders, desire foreign experiences, and consume imported, even banned, goods ranging from alcohol to books. As I argue of increasingly networked societies in my introduction, these global flows necessitate a new political project within cinema to depict the interrelated nature of contemporary subjectivity. *Bab El-Oued City*, for example, shows the impossibility for the same subjective homogenization of *Battle of Algiers* to occur in contemporary Algeria. Politically speaking, *Bab El-Oued City* also illustrates both the desire and inability to achieve democracy in the early 1990's Algeria through the use of an indeterminate or messianic form of time.

The People are Missing: Third Cinema's Politics

The difference between classical and modern political cinemas belongs to the greater discourse in film studies surrounding third cinema. I do not locate a particular type of politics as *the* politics of third cinema, but instead argue that this continuum from

classical to modern exists within the discourse of third cinema. In this section I will address three manifestos core to the discourse of third cinema, because, as manifestos, they describe both trends in the films that belong to the movement and what third cinema proponents desired from these films. This background helps to illustrate my argument that Deleuze's use of 'third world' refers to a particular geopolitical problematic where a people does not find representation within the available or popular cinema. The mode of resistance encouraged by these political manifestos as a response to this situation is to create the necessary conditions for a new, local (but also global, in the case if *Bab El-Oued City*) subject to emerge.

The term third cinema was coined by writer-filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their essay “Towards a Third Cinema”. The essay begins with an epigraph by Frantz Fanon, “we must discuss, we must invent”, which provides a fitting starting place for the discussion of third cinema in describing its general task of creating a cinema that would act as a political talking point and one that would create an alternative to Hollywood and neo-colonial cinemas (Solanas and Getino 1997, 33). Other writers, such as Julio Garcia Espinosa and Glauber Rocha, also contributed to the growing discourse of third cinema, which generally takes these two premises as its starting point: the trend of imitating Hollywood in world cinema reduces the revolutionary potential of film, and: to reclaim cinema as a revolutionary medium new methods of making and viewing cinema must be invented. Third cinema, in other words, aims to critique by discussing systems of repression and operate according to radically different aesthetics. To explain how third cinema films were different from films being created in the United

States and Europe at the time, it is most useful to discuss Solanas and Getino's essay in more depth and look at their accompanying film *La hora de los hornos* (1968).

Solanas and Getino wrote their third cinema manifesto soon after creating *La hora de los hornos*. The manifesto takes as its subject what the filmmakers tried to create with *La hora*. At its most basic level, Solanas and Getino call for a film that shifts from being a product of consumer culture to an active product of social revolution. The authors recognize that colonial powers rule through an 'ecology of ideas,' to borrow a term from Félix Guattari, and that cinema is a powerful subject-creating tool (Guattari 2000). To create a cinema that works towards independence from colonial powers, the way cinema is created and consumed must be radically reorganized. This is the case, because the 'System', Solanas and Getino's term for the colonial state apparatus, works to create subjects that aspire to the bourgeois values espoused by colonial cinema and culture.

The authors call this revolutionary cinema 'third cinema', which can be opposed to the first cinema of Hollywood and the second cinema of Europe, the latter often being deemed 'art cinema', although third cinema is not so much a geopolitical designation as it is theoretical or formal. It is possible, for example, for a third cinema film to appear in the first world, which means that to determine that status of a film it is more appropriate to examine a film holistically in considering its geopolitical context, its formal mechanisms of representation, and the political organization it engenders. To explain how third cinema operates in a radically different manner than either first or second cinemas, the authors introduce the concept of the 'film act', an understanding of film-

viewing as an event that includes three facets:

> The participant comrade, the man-actor-accomplice who responded to the summons [of the film and of the filmmaker];
> The free space where that man expressed his concerns and ideas, became politicised, and started to free himself; and
> The film, important only as a detonator or pretext. (Solanas and Getino 1997, 54)

Rather than going through the channels of distribution that first and second cinemas follow, such as commercial cinemas, third cinema aspires to create events where the 'film act' occurs, a cross between a film viewing and a political rally. In the process of the film act, the spectator transforms from passive viewer to politically engaged subject. The safe space created for the film viewing helps to achieve this transformation by giving the participant a free place to contribute to political discussion without fear of repercussion from the colonial/dominant power. Even though they call this a 'free space', the authors acknowledge the risk each participant faces – if agents from the state in power were to suddenly show up, for example. This risk, however, is the very force that makes each participant a member of the movement and gives them the impetus to speak out. Thus the *risk* itself is a fundamental aspect of the film act, insofar as it interpellates a revolutionary subject that opposes a dominant system, thereby producing politicized, extra-filmic subjectivities alongside the subjects on screen.

Similar to “Towards a Third Cinema”, Julio Garcia Espinosa’s essay “For an Imperfect Cinema” calls for a method of filmmaking that resists the hegemony of a Hollywood aesthetic. It maintains both the manifesto-like and revolutionary spirit of Solanas and Getino’s original essay, especially in regards to the critique of 'first cinema'. The main opposition that Espinosa sets up in his essay is between the *technically perfect* cinema

of Hollywood, and what he proposes as an *imperfect cinema*. For Espinosa, *imperfect* doesn't mean bad as in an evaluative judgment, but rather a style of filmmaking that does not reach for technical perfection above all else. He argues that

> Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in quality or technique. It can be created equally well with a Mitchell or with an 8mm camera, in a studio or in a guerrilla camp in the middle of the jungle. Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in predetermined taste, and much less in "good taste." It is not quality which it seeks in an artist's work. The only thing it is interested in is how an artist responds to the following question: What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the "cultured" elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work? (Espinosa 1979, 26)

Espinosa understands that the cinema coming out of schools administered by the neocolonial elite – the 'System' for Solanas and Getino – will reflect not only a style of filmmaking that aspires to another cultural order, of Hollywood rather than Cuba, but also one that reveres a transcendental order over a belief in revolutionary change. By directly refusing the 'predetermined taste' created by the tradition of first, and even second, cinema films, filmmakers immediately tap into a radical aesthetic that resists, and helps viewers of the film resist, ideas sponsored by colonial and neocolonial powers. Thus, for Espinosa, the most important feature of 'imperfect' films is that they help create a space for critiquing colonial orders by drawing audiences out of spectacle-laden films that invoke Hollywood themes and techniques and thereby allowing (local) subjects that do not desire these foreign products to emerge.

Whereas Espinosa's essay sees imperfection itself as a critique of colonial cinemas, Glauber Rocha situates Latin-American cinema within a greater order of world cinemas by highlighting its violence. In his essay "The Aesthetic of Hunger", Rocha follows a similar line of thinking to Espinosa, Solanas and Getino in saying that political Latin-

American films are fundamentally different from first or second cinema films, because of their ‘wretchedness’ and “themes of hunger: characters eating dirt and roots, characters stealing to eat, characters killing to eat, characters fleeing to eat” (Rocha 1995, 68). And because the “foreign onlooker cultivates the taste of this misery, not as a tragic *symptom*, but merely as an esthetic object within his field of interest” the misery and hunger of political Latin-American films must do more than just portray the suffering of the people, it must *impose* this suffering and hunger through an *aesthetics of violence* (69). Only affective violence through sounds and images would be able to translate the hunger felt by the starving Latin-American people through the medium of film – thus the blinding glare of Nelson Pereira dos Santos’ film *Vidas Secas* (1963) does not just represent the deserts of Brazil, it assaults the viewers' sensory-perception with its painfully bright light. Echoing Fanon’s proclamation, Rocha begins to conclude his essay with the argument: “a first policeman had to die for the French to become aware of the Algerians” (70). In other words, violence – even through the medium of film – makes the starvation of Latin-Americans felt more acutely than representation can. Rocha highlights the affective nature of certain third cinema films, because otherwise the films risk being subsumed into an apolitical market of festival films (by the 'foreign onlooker'), where the films are stripped of their political potential to mobilize viewers into thinking and acting differently.

Each manifesto offers a new strategy of resistance to liberal market practices and the homogenizing tendencies within first and second cinemas as they travel globally and saturate foreign markets. These third cinema strategies primarily act upon subjectivity

as a way to steel subjectivities against colonial and neocolonial ideals, and to disrupt the appropriation of colonial aesthetics as transcendental, perfect aesthetics. Speaking of a similar situation in relation to diaspora communities, where individuals come into conflict with the 'dominant society', Naficy argues that this 'steeling of subjectivity' can take two forms: “one may create paranoid structures and citadel cultures of withdrawal or may engage in rhizomatic group affiliations” (Naficy 2001, 6-7). In other words, the formation of subjects can either take the form of a classical politics, in advocating a homogenous, national group, or a modern politics, by suggesting a diverse yet resistant community. While Naficy speaks of a very different cultural and political situation, diaspora as opposed to colonialism or neo-colonialism, the interaction between individual peoples and majoritarian regime remains similar. Deleuze reveals an awareness of this problem in first articulating the need for a modern political cinema: “Sometimes the third world film-maker finds himself before an illiterate public, swamped by American, Egyptian, or Indian serials, and karate films, and he has to go through all this, it is this material he has to work on, to extract from it the elements of a people who are still missing” (Deleuze 1986, 217). Though Deleuze frames this as an issue of an illiterate public, I would extend this observation to include the increasing presence of global distribution companies with such comprehensive control of the market that this need not be a question of literacy, but desire and access. As Espinosa, Solanas, and Getino in particular observe, the hegemony of Hollywood products results in the creation of audiences or subjects who desire more of the same, eliminating spaces for innovation. And if a certain public has no access to an alternative, the cycle of distribution and consumption becomes a autopoietic system that reproduces selfsame

products. Regardless of how these spaces where new subjects and interests might emerge are eliminated, Deleuze sees a productive potential in film: “Art, and especially cinematographic art, must take part in this task: not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people” (217). In other words, of contributing to the modern political project of invention as opposed to a classical political project of revolutionary solidarity.

Before moving towards a modern political cinema, I will next turn to *Battle of Algiers* as an example of this classical political project that presupposes a people 'already there'. *Battle of Algiers* serves as a useful example of the classical political cinema, because it presents an account of successful revolutionary activity based on the homogenization of a population's subjectivity. Though he seems to advocate modern politics in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze also reveals a classical politics of third cinema: “There will no longer be conquest of power by a proletariat, or by a united or unified people. The best third world film-makers could believe in this for a time: Rocha's Guevarism, Chahine's Nasserism, black American cinema's black-powerism” (219-220). Deleuze does not give a compelling argument as to why this classical politics is no longer possible, but since the modern political cinema is founded in opposition to a traditional, Marxist politics of class struggle, I will use *Battle of Algiers* as a case study of the classical political cinema to further examine why such a politics is no longer possible. I will then move on to films that remain within the same context of Algeria to determine how the geopolitical, cultural, and historical situation has changed to necessitate a modern politics. By moving from *Battle of Algiers* into the 'new era of globalization', as Chomsky puts it, I

argue that increasing global movement through the passage of goods, ideas, and peoples introduces a fragmentation that helps to explain why 'there will no longer be conquest of power by a proletariat'.

Battle of Algiers: An Exercise in Revolution

Battle of Algiers takes place in Algiers from roughly 1954 to 1962, the years of the Algerian Revolution. The film begins in media res, with the capture of iconic revolutionary Ali la Pointe. At the point of his probable capture, a dissolve takes the viewer back to the beginning of the revolution in 1954. After the dissolve, the camera appears in the European Quarter, but then pans and zooms in on the Casbah. Military action aside, with its obvious connotations of friend and enemy, the film begins setting up an oppositional relationship between the Europeans and their 'Other' in this movement of the camera that emphasizes the separation of these two spaces. Immediately after this sequence, voice-over narration dictates the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale or 'National Liberation Front') revolutionary mandate:

> National Liberation Front, Communiqué Number 1. People of Algeria, our combat is directed against colonialism. Our aim independence and restoration of the Algerian state, in accordance with Islamic principles and the respect of basic liberties, regardless of race or religion. To avoid bloodshed, we propose that the French authorities negotiate with us our right to self-determination. Algerians, it is your duty to save your country and restore its liberty. Its victory will be yours. Onward, brothers! Unite! The FLN calls you to arms.

Composed of men, women, and children going about their daily business, this sequence stands apart from the main narrative of the film itself. Its expositionary nature mimics the instructional tone of the Communiqué, and the people who are the target of this Communiqué are clearly depicted in sequences set in the Casbah. With this short sequence, the film overviews the narrative at large: the construction of clearly separate

subjects, Algerian or FLN resistance against European colonists, and the eventual capture of FLN leadership. Of course, history tells us that this is not how the story ends, but the ultimate point of *Battle of Algiers* is not a revelation of what happened during the Algerian War, but *how* things happened. Namely, the unification of the Algerian people that allowed the rise of the proletariat, prompted by the opposition of classes, the reification of the subject, and the homogenization of 'the people'.

The scene directly after the exposition of FLN directives is instructive in illustrating how the film explains the struggle between two classes formally. The film returns to Ali la Pointe's origins before joining the FLN, beginning with his time as a street hustler. While running a card game in an alley, a woman points out Ali to a police officer saying, “He's always there!” Ali, noticing, immediately takes off as a chase commences between Ali and the officer. It appears as if Ali is making a clean break until he passes a group of clearly European people in a crowd on the sidewalk. One of the Europeans asks, “What's his big hurry?” and another yells, “Stop him”. A young man in the crowd trips Ali as he runs by, and the camera moves into a close-up on the young man's grinning face. With the close-up, the viewer can examine the young man's European features in detail; he is clearly not Algerian. Ali gets up, furious, and although he sees the police officer coming up behind him, he punches the young man in the face. The crowd of Europeans jumps Ali, and he is captured by the police officer. While the Europeans all attack Ali, a brief montage of close-ups reveals faces similar to the young man's: all fair-skinned and European. The distinction between peoples is not only political, a question of independence, or religious, a matter of an Islamic state, but also

racial, ideological, and biopolitical insofar as it concerns ways of living in the world: an 'us' and 'them'. This clear distinction between groups of people is a core facet of the classical political cinema, and is articulated insightfully by Carl Schmitt: “The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation . . . [the enemy is] the other, the stranger . . . in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible.” (Schmitt 2007, 26-27). In this scene, Schmitt's distinction is clear, the European 'friends' can jump the 'enemy' without incurring any existential anguish. Furthermore, this distinction between friend and enemy is possible because each subject is actively opposed to the other.

As Ali is carried off to jail, another voice-over details his personal history as well as previous criminal offences. The details, “Occupation laborer, bricklayer, boxer. Currently unemployed. Military status draft dodger . . . one year in reformatory for vandalism . . . two years for disorderly conduct,” describe a working class subject, angered by the colonial order, and with a history of disobedience. Though disgruntled with authorities, Ali lacks a unified cause at this point in the film. This clear cause constitutes the second component of the classical political cinema. Although the 'cause' has already been delivered to the spectator in the form of 'Communiqué Number 1,' the spectator is also privy to Ali's revolutionary awakening in prison. The prison Ali is incarcerated in seems to be made up exclusively of Algerians, but beyond racial unity, the Algerians also express a solidarity in sentiment. As a man is being taken to his execution by guillotine, he yells, “Allah is great!” and “Long live Algeria!” The guards

try to silence him by covering his mouth, but the inmates begin cheering together and gesturing to Ali to join in. Ali does not share their fervor, however, and it is not until he witnesses the execution itself that a change takes place. As the man approaches the guillotine, the inmates grow quiet, and Ali jumps up to the barred window for a better view. An eyeline match linking the execution to a close-up on Ali's intent eyes communicates the transformation taking place as Ali bears witness to an act that affects the way he understands the world. While, in its affective nature, this might be construed as an encounter with something intolerable as mentioned in my introduction, it is important to note that despite Deleuze's aligning of the intolerable with the modern political cinema, affect and visceral emotion can construct a classical politics just as easily. For Deleuze, the intolerable prompts a mobilization of an individual's subjectivity. In the case of *Battle of Algiers*, Ali's witnessing of the execution expresses the impossibility of living under French colonial rule, and enables his transition to becoming a revolutionary. In other words, this act of witnessing radicalizes Ali's subjectivity and develops his desire that leads him to join the FLN, presenting him with a clear, unified cause. This film clearly aligns the 'intolerable act' with the French colonial order, however, creating an almost didactic effect. In this instance, the affect is harnessed for a particular political cause, almost as if propaganda. *Battle of Algiers* cements this causal connection by transitioning directly to his enrollment in the FLN after this act of witnessing.

Until this point, I have discussed the classical political cinema in terms of how it creates clear, opposed identities and expresses a unified cause. Both of these facets of *Battle of*

Algiers are ways that the film shows *how* the Algerian Revolution started, or some of the necessary conditions for its emergence. I will now turn to the depiction of militarization and political goals of the FLN in the film. While not all classical films contain the same focus on militarization as *Battle of Algiers*, this aspect shows the film's unique method of establishing the unequivocal focus required by a classical politics. In other words, the way that *Battle of Algiers* establishes a revolution that seeks *particular* aims, in a *particular* manner, through *particular* methods constructs a sensory-motor schema that describes a singular vision for the future of the Algerian state. Although the 'Communiqué Number 1' mandates freedom of religion, the film, *Battle of Algiers*, suggests the creation of a very particular subject to inhabit post-Revolutionary War Algeria: Islamic-Algerian.

The FLN's revolutionary methods are depicted throughout the film, and are not limited to the terrorist activities that the film is most memorable for, but include identity-based austerity measures and collective action. FLN leader Ben M'Hidi relates FLN strategy to Ali before the two-week strike, “Acts of violence don't win wars. Neither wars nor revolutions. Terrorism is useful as a start. But then, the people themselves must act.” This conversation gives an overview of the general direction of FLN efforts, starting with the attacks on police officers and bombings, 'useful as a start'. Although a platitude to say that terrorism causes divisions amongst people, it is important that *Battle of Algiers* carries this division out in the film as part of its operation as a classical political cinema. After assaults on police officers, French authorities respond by cordoning off the Arab Quarter, because it is known to protect FLN militants. Although we have

already seen division amongst the Algerians and French in the film with the example of Ali being tripped by the French man, this second level separation makes this division public. It also allows French police officers to sequester and terrorize, through bombing, the Algerian population. Similarly, the Algerian reprisal targets specifically French locations/populations. The three targets the FLN bombers strike include two Western style cafes and an airport. As Ben M'Hidi suggests in the film, this strategic terrorism is only part of an identity-building assemblage with the overall project of mobilizing a particular population. Conversely, this assemblage also mobilizes French identity, such as when the population of the French Quarter falsely accuses a random Algerian on the street of being a terrorist. Regardless of whether the unification of a French identity was part of M'Hidi's plans, it enforces the overall thrust of the classical political cinema in stratifying identity and erecting oppositional relationships.

Identity-based austerity measures compose the second facet of this identity-building assemblage. A voice-over narrates 'National Liberation Front, Communiqué Number 24':

> People of Algeria, the Colonial Administration is responsible not only for impoverishing our people, but also for corrupting and degrading our brothers and sisters, who have lost their sense of dignity. The FLN is leading a campaign to eradicate this scourge and requests the population's help and cooperation. This is the first step towards independence. As of today, the FLN assumes responsibility for the physical and more well-being of the Algerian people and has therefore decided to ban the sale and use of all drugs and alcoholic beverages and to ban prostitution and procuring. Offenders will be punished. Repeat offenders will be sentenced to death.

While the voice-over narration relays this message, a drunk stumbles down the street as passerbys scowl at him, and a veiled woman pushes him, saying, “You have lost your

dignity". He is followed down a side street by a group of children who begin to harass him, tugging and pushing him, chanting "wino, wino." An older man whistles, calling a large group of children that drag him to the ground and pull him down a flight of steps. In this manner, the FLN goes as far as to police identity. Later, Ali executes a drug dealer, furthering this FLN ordinance, but the police-action on the part of the children is more significant as it signals the reformation of a particular subjectivity, not just attacks against 'Other' or enemy subjects. As James D. Le Sueur argues, the FLN's progam consisted of

> violent theories of authenticity articulated most clearly by the adopted revolutionary Frantz Fanon, culminat[ing] in the state's vision of the nation that pitted unity against individuality, authoritarianism against liberalism, national identity against ethnic and regional differences, an Arabic against other indigenous languages and French. (Le Sueur 2010, 2)

In each of these dichotomies, there is a 'correct' subject-position to assume: unity, authoritarian, national, Arabic, and, in *Battle of Algiers*, Islamic. To energize this subject-creating machine, Communiqué Number 24 also calls for collective action, the last stage of Ben M'Hidi's revolutionary program.

Eventually, FLN receives attention from the United Nations, who are set to debate the question of Algerian independence. Responding to this debate, the FLN organizes a two week strike to show the extent of support for an independent Algeria. This collective action on the part of FLN members and supportive Algerians examples the final important facet of the classical political cinema: the unified action of a well-defined group of people. As I will illustrate later, this is also an important part of the goal of modern political cinemas, but in the classical political cinema collective action does not

allow for the proliferation of identity, as per Communiqué Number 24 and FLN policing measures. As M'Hidi points out, “Every striker will be recognized as an enemy”. Collective action, in the classical political cinema, is tantamount to declaring allegiance and assuming the role of a particular subject position. In the eyes of the FLN, and they hope the world, each Algerian striker becomes a member of the FLN at least for the time of the strike. Unfortunately, this also becomes judicial truth, and allows the French paratroopers to storm the Casbah and treat all strikers as terrorists. At this point in the film, the Algerian population becomes biopolitical in its most negative sense: due to racial and more generally class-based positions, individuals can be apprehended and treated as the political enemy. The two week strike works to amplify and separate biopolitical entities between potential friends and clear enemies, as Schmitt envisions.

After requisitioning the Algerian strikers and sending them to labor camps, leader of the French paratroopers Colonel Mathieu asks his soldiers, “Any of you ever suffer from tapeworm?” At this point in the film, the organism of the tapeworm becomes a metaphor for the organization or resiliency of the Algerian resistance. Mathieu continues, “It is a worm that can grow infinitely. You can destroy its thousands of segments but as long as the head remains, it rebuilds and proliferates. The FLN is similarly organized. The head is the Executive Bureau. Several persons. As long as they're not eliminated, we're back to zero”. The metaphor of the tapeworm fits well with an analysis of *Battle of Algiers* as a classical political cinema, because while the worm might be 'segmented' and have the potential for 'infinite growth', it remains the same organism, the same tapeworm. At least within the life cycle of a tapeworm, there is no evolutionary growth. This sameness

of the tapeworm illustrates the uniformity in those proclaiming Algerian independence, at least insofar as they are portrayed in the film *Battle of Algiers*.

Eventually, Mathieu succeeds in eliminating the FLN leadership, and proclaims: “The tapeworm's headless now”. Reflecting on the success of their campaign, one of Mathieu's men comments, “But Algiers isn't all of Algeria,” and Mathieu replies, “No, Algiers isn't all of Algeria”. And accordingly, several sequences that take the form of an epilogue relate the resurgence of Algerian resistance two years later and the eventual independence of Algeria. The reintegration of the Algerian people into a French state falters before the ultimate alterity that the Algerian people are able to construct. Speaking of the ululation of Algerian women, a voice-over narrator states towards the end of the film, “The Muslim quarter still echoes with those unintelligible and frightening rhythmic cries”, completely missing the very much intelligible cultural connotations of this practice in the narrator's strict Othering of the Algerians. Perhaps the tapeworm was longer than Mathieu anticipated, or perhaps the rhizome might be a better model, but ending with this historic victory of the Algerian resistance emphasizes the singular focus, and perhaps efficacy, of the classical political cinema: a political project carried out by a unified people, involving collective action and the construction of a coherent subjectivity opposed to that of the oppressors. While useful for articulating singular political struggles, or reimaging political struggles of the past, the appropriateness of the classical political cinema becomes complicated with the advance of global capitalism and the proliferation of desires, identities, and collective affiliations. Though in many ways a very similar film, *Outside the Law* illustrates how

the classical political cinema begins to break down once identity begins to fragment and global networks begin to form in a less idealistic reimagining of past political struggles.

Outside the Law: Global Revision of Earlier Battles

Outside the Law retraces the steps of *Battle of Algiers*, offering a differing perspective on the Algerian Revolution and the history of Algeria from 1925 to 1962. Where *Battle of Algiers* suggests that the struggle against colonialism was limited to Algeria internally, however, *Outside the Law* argues that this conflict was a global phenomenon due to the forced relocation of Algerian peoples, trans-continental wars, and the rising importance of global public opinion. To illustrate the global nature of the Algerian people's struggle, *Outside the Law* focuses on the struggle of the FLN inside France. Whereas *Battle of Algiers* erects solid geopolitical boundaries through reinforcing the friend and enemy distinction and the almost complete non-presence of an exterior, *Outside the Law* begins to establish a network of connections linking Algeria to not only its French colonizer, but also globalized identities, wars in Indochina, peace talks in Geneva, and music in the United States. While these examples show globalization in a nascent state, they highlight an important lack in *Battle of Algiers*, and the inability of this earlier film to illustrate these global flows reveals a potential reason as to why classical politics are no longer possible for Deleuze. If the classical political cinema is predicated upon its ability to construct oppositional identities and clear lines of conflict or struggle, this political project begins to break down in *Outside the Law*, despite its ties to *Battle of Algiers* and focus on the same historical and political context. While the reason for this might be attributed to the fact that it is a modern film for a modern audience, it is a fruitful example in that it illustrates what happens to the classical

political project when its generic boundaries begins to degrade. *Outside the Law* is by no means a modern political cinema, but one can begin to identify a movement in this direction which reveals how global interrelation begins to alter the political project at hand. This difference is shown particularly well by the conflict between brother Abdelkader, who takes up the revolutionary model, and Said, who expresses a more hybrid identity that precludes the possibility of traditional revolutionary action.

Outside the Law's most immediately noticeable difference from *Battle of Algiers* is the way in which it dramatizes its story by focusing specifically on a single family rather than class struggle more generally. The story begins on the family's farm in 1925, with the 'gendarmes' – here meaning officials representing French colonial rule, even if indigenous Algerians – arriving to cease land for handover to French farmers. Despite the family's protest that the land has been passed from generation to generation, the gendarmes cite their lack of documents that would otherwise cement and protect their 'private property' as reason enough to take their land. The patriarch exclaims indignantly: "we have no deeds". In this instance, the family's private trouble with the gendarme Khaid that the viewer witnesses in this scene stands in for the much larger colonial project of uprooting and displacing Algerian farmers in order to exploit the natural resources of Algeria. As was the case with many families historically, the protagonist-family of *Outside the Law* moves to Algiers in order to seek another source of income. The film transitions to 1945 by way of newsreel style footage, which first shows French citizens celebrating in France on May 8, 1945, the day Germany surrendered to the Allied forces in WWII. The film then cuts to Setif on the same day,

and the newsreel aesthetic fades, leaving the viewer amidst a very different event taking place on May 8 in Algeria, the 'Setif Massacre' – a sensitive and disputed event for historians.

A rich semiotic-strategy, the fading in and out of the newsreel footage is a movement between historical events in the classical sense, where a clearly identifiable group of people is showing their support for a cause or historical outcome, and the more modern representational strategy of collapsing public sentiment with private narratives. As the Setif Massacre erupts over the struggle between French police officer and Algerian youth who will not relinquish an Algerian flag, the camera hones in on the protagonist-brothers amongst the carnage. The camera shows the way in which the two brothers who are currently residing in Algiers avoid getting killed during the massacre in action-packed sequences, but the pace slows to reveal the massacre of the brothers' sisters and father. By revealing this extreme and personal trauma, the film sets up the premise of the narrative: the bond between brothers caught up in colonial conflict. This struggle, however, is not just a struggle between 'the Algerians' and 'the French' as depicted in *Battle of Algiers*. Instead, the focus on a particular set of actors shows the struggle of *Outside the Law* to be between a band of brothers and the enemy that instigated the trauma in their personal lives from uprooting them from their ancestral home to murdering their father and sisters. In doing so, the film dramatizes historical events for the sake of entertainment, but it also collapses the distinction between private stories and political struggles. In other words, the personal tragedy of the protagonist-family communicates larger political concerns over how we understand historical events tied to

France's colonial past.

Despite the ways that the film begins to dismantle the project of the 'classical political cinema' by introducing a private narrative into the tale of class struggle, this sequence is poignant in terms of the connection between *Outside the Law* and *Battle of Algiers*. While the latter largely avoids the Setif Massacre as the specific event that fostered the revolutionary desires of the Algerian population, preferring to focus on general racism and identity-division instead, this sequence borrows certain images directly from *Battle of Algiers*. Patricia Pisters has documented the way that *The Battle of Algiers* has operated as an "open archive", providing materials for later films, social movements, and even military action (Pisters 2012). Validating her argument, many details and their formal representation are borrowed directly from *Battle of Algiers.* During the massacre, for example, the French are separated from the Algerians by virtue of their positions on the balconies in the city. This positioning illustrates a socio-economic difference on one register, while also revealing the apprehension or fear of the indigenous population on the part of the French occupiers on another. These images of the French watching the action on the street below from their balconies repeats several instances of this from *Battle of Algiers*, such as when the Algerian man who appears to be living on the street is (wrongly) accused of taking part in crimes and the French call down accusations from their balconies. In *Outside the Law*, however, the French rain down bullets rather than insults. Despite the narrative's insistence on following the brothers specifically, these moments pay homage to *Battle of Algiers* and reveal the classical political tendencies of *Outside the Law,* and perhaps the director's political intent in reimagining these

historical events in an even more violent manner. In doing so, *Outside the Law* straddles political and representational strategies, not conforming to either the classical political or modern political project. This juxtaposition between a classical politics and a modern politics plays out poignantly in the different stories of Abdelkader and Said, including desires that reveal facets of their subjectivity.

Abdelkader, characterized as being the 'brainy' brother, is the most overtly revolutionary of the family. In the beginning of the film, he marches for Algerian independence and urges his brother Said to do so as well. Said, preoccupied with a boxing match, seems to care little for the independence of Algeria or its continued occupation as a French colony. After violence breaks out during the Setif Massacre, Abdelkader is rounded up by French forces along with lines of other Algerians. Later, the viewer learns that he has been imprisoned in France. Abdelkader's imprisonment closely mimic's Ali's imprisonment from *Battle of Algiers*. The prison scenes from each film show the prison as a meeting ground for like-minded revolutionaries, chanting slogans and showing an acceptance of their fate as revolutionaries when sent to the guillotine. Ali's act of witnessing, which I described in detail previously, reoccurs here with Abdelkader. A fellow prisoner is called to the guillotine and Abdelkader uses a chair to climb up to a tall set of iron bars to witness the execution. Although the cinematography is not as aggressive in *Outside the Law*, lacking the extreme close-ups and eyeline matches, the intimate affect this scene has on Abdelkader clearly mimics Ali's revolutionary mobilization. *Outside the Law* offers slightly more explication in this scene, however, with a revolutionary leader speaking to him directly afterwards in his prison cell, giving

him orders to begin gathering FLN recruits. Despite Abdelkader's distinction of being brainy and Ali's of being illiterate, these two characters are made out to be revolutionary counterparts. In fact, Abdelkader's big dramatic dynamic in the film is that he is 'married' to the revolution, casting aside any notion of a personal life. Like the identity-based austerity measures enacted in *Battle of Algiers* (the enforcing of a Muslim-Algerian identity), FLN directives forbid Algerians to drink, smoke, or otherwise take part in French culture and industry. While Abdelkader easily follows this directive, showing less regret than either of his brothers and often reminding Messaoud that he shouldn't expect to have a family, Said has a difficult time shaping his identity and conforming to the revolutionary ideal required by the FLN.

Said's fragmented identity is established in the beginning scenes of the film, when Abdelkader asks him to take part in the march for independence. As mentioned previously, he declines because he is more interested in his boxing match. The boxing match is swept up in the chaos of the Setif Massacre, however, and Said is forced to run. He returns home to discover his father and sisters murdered – the only brother to have witnessed their deaths. It would be a mistake to say that the colonial struggle does not play a role in the construction of his subjectivity, because after the death of his family and witnessing some small-scale revolutionary action within Algeria – an Algerian pulls out a hidden pistol and murders a police officer before running off, once again pay homage to *Battle of Algiers* – he locates the gendarme, Khaid, that originally pushed his family off its land and murders him with a knife. This scene of murder is clearly very personal, as he seeks out an actor involved in his family's narrative and stabs him

repeatedly rather than employing the hit-and-run tactics of the other revolutionaries in the film. He also calls the gendarme a 'traitor', because he is an Algerian who took a privileged position within the French hierarchy. By labeling him a traitor, he invokes the political bid for Algerian independence. Later, once the story has moved to France, he aids the FLN action in France by contributing funds that he earns through his nightclub, 'The Casbah', to the revolutionary cause. Though he has good reason to take part in the revolution, the murder of his family, he is completely unwilling to conform to the FLN austerity measures and at times seems fully integrated into French culture. In fact, the character he most clearly corresponds with in *Battle of Algiers* is the drug dealer Ali kills when the FLN first enforces its austerity measures. This threat of death is not removed in *Outside the Law*, despite the fact that Said funds the revolution and is the brother of several leaders of the revolution within France. Abdelkader warns Said that the FLN will kill him, and his prized boxer, if he doesn't cease his participation in the French boxing circuit, in which the championship match would make Said's Algerian boxer the champion of *France*. In this manner, Said most clearly breaks down the strategies of the classical political cinema operating in *Outside the Law.* Whereas *Battle of Algiers* is almost impersonal, despite the fact that it largely follows Ali, *Outside the Law* introduces difference between potential political modes in the form of the three brothers, particularly in Said who espouses a hybrid or fragmentary French-Algerian identity and Abdelkader who denies his own desires for anything outside the revolution, such as the French sympathizer that shows romantic interest in him.

Despite the way *Outside the Law* perfectly mirrors *Battle of Algiers* at times, it does not

fully commit to the representational strategies enacted by this latter film as a classical political cinema. It would be difficult to pinpoint the reason for this difference, as the two films were made 45 years apart, even if they focus on the same historical event. As Pisters points out, “Presenting a humanized past, this type of historical cinema... revisits the past but adjusts it according to the insights and changed needs of the present, giving the present a different past” (Pisters 2012, 226). The interest of *Outside the Law* in global features is an important difference to point out, and may provide some insight into why *Outside the Law* cannot commit to a more conservative political project. Though the United Nations makes an important appearance in *Battle of Algiers*, giving the FLN reason to embark upon their strike, the international entity remains an abstract concept in the film, and ultimately fails to impact the FLN's project. *Outside the Law*, on the other hand, shows the global nature of the FLN struggle. It does not remain in Algeria, but spans to France and Germany as well. It is set amongst other, similar conflicts, such as the First Indochina War. 'Public opinion' does not remain an abstract concept, as FLN leadership is shown actually meeting with international bodies in Geneva. And, on a lighter note, Abdelkader and Messaoud encounter American music while meeting a weapons supplier in Germany. Perhaps predictably, Abdelkader rejects the music asking, "how can you dance to this?" while Messaoud admits that there might be some merit in it. The way this more recent film openly acknowledges the emerging globalization of the time is a symptom of our already-globalized times. It would be disingenuous to ignore these aspects of the historical conflict when they so clearly played an important role in how this part of history is represented, but, more importantly, due to this acknowledgment the film must also begin to shift

representational strategies. It is certainly not a modern political film, a type of film that reveals minoritarian subjects overcoded by dominant discourses, but it shows movement in this direction. To more clearly show the way in which *Bab El-Oued City* acts as a modern political film, I will now provide a more detailed discussion of how a modern political film can construct minoritarian subjects on screen.

The Modern Political Film: Fragmentation, Desire, and Multitude

The modern political film focuses on another chapter in the project of third cinema, by stressing a non-oppositional politics in the already established discourse surrounding these political films. Rather than suggesting a division of peoples, modern political cinemas contribute to the creation of a new people altogether – one who affirms their belief in the extra-cinematic world and their ability to change it. That is not to say that the subjects themselves did not pre-exist as living entities, but that modern political films allow the possibility for these subjects to articulate positions that were previously overcoded or suppressed by a majoritarian discourse or norm. As mentioned in the introduction to this project, Deleuze locates an ethico-political project in cinemas ability to inspire a belief in the world, and this concept of belief and change already takes place in third cinema manifestos. In Espinosa's *imperfect cinema*, for example, he sees "'lucid' people… the ones who think and feel and exist in a world which they can change. In spite of all the problems and difficulties, they are convinced that they can transform it in a revolutionary way" and believes more in "the sick man than in the healthy one because his truth is purged by suffering" (Espinosa 1979, 25-26). In each case, there is a turn away from transcendental orders, 'truth is purged by suffering', and the pursuit of perfection in order to turn towards the world itself and the redoubled

effort to improve life. The verisimilitude between Espinosa and Deleuze in this instance hints at Deleuze's interest in third cinema. Although third cinema writers suggested new directions for third cinema to take, Deleuze defines a cinema that is even more explicit in its creation or fragmentation of cinematic subjects. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of Multitude provides a more recent dialogue on the construction of subjectivity, which helps to explain contemporary shifts in the production of subjectivity.

In *Multitude,* Hardt and Negri note a significant change post-1968 in forms of organization, labor, and revolutionary activity:

> After 1968, the year in which a long cycle of struggles culminated in both the dominant and subordinated parts of the world, the form of resistance and liberation movements began to change radically—a change that corresponded with the changes in the labor force and the forms of social production. . . . The techniques of guerrilla warfare began to be adapted to the new conditions of post-Fordist production, in line with information systems and network structures. (Hardt and Negri 2005, 80-81)

In this shift, the authors note several important changes to revolutionary struggles. A break occurs between revolutionary groups that adopt older, military-based organizational structures. These structures are hierarchical and have clear leadership, such as the 'tapeworm' of *Battle of Algiers*. Other groups, however, decentralize and change tactics from violent, terrorist activity aimed at attacking a ruling regime to the *transformation* of a place itself. This transformation coincides with another noted change of revolutionary struggles moving from rural to urban settings. Accordingly, revolutionary tactics change from terrorizing an opposed force to cultivating cultures of disobedience, resistance, desertion, sabotage, and counterpower (here 'counter' equates

with 'alternative', not necessitating an oppositional relationship). We see hints of this activity in traditional revolutionary struggles, in *Battle of Algiers*, but in this transition a relationship develops between the organization of movements and the "*organization of economic and social production*" (82). This relationship between models of economic and social production mirrors the post-Fordist change, or move away from traditional, factory models of labor to decentralized and mobile units of production prominent in globalized labor. In this equation, Fordist modes of production compare to the organization of subjectivity and struggle in classical political cinemas. If modern political films fit the post-Fordist model, on the other hand, in these films it is no longer "just a matter of 'winning hearts and minds,' . . . but rather of creating new hearts and minds through the construction of new circuits of communication, new forms of social collaboration, and new modes of interaction" (81). These 'new modes of interaction' more closely resemble the networked society Castells locates post-2000.

Hardt and Negri equate this new political activity with a more lateral form of organization. Whereas traditional hierarchical models of revolutionary organization require a particular subject, their transformation allows for the proliferation of subjects. As I argued earlier, the political project of *Battle of Algiers* focuses on the 'production of subjectivity' as a key component in the Algerian resistance and revolutionary struggle, but this subjectivity is strictly limited. Communiqué Number 24 defines parameters within which this population can exist: no drinking or use of drugs, at risk of execution if they cannot conform – biopower used as a strict regulatory measure. The strategic bombing of French cultural sites prevents any Algerian-French cultural experimentation

or fusion. Their political mode, resembling the political philosophy of Schmitt, requires this differentiation. Regardless of whether the construction of an Islamic-Algerian subject was such a strict goal of the Algerian resistance historically, which would align it with the less cinema-based arguments of Hardt and Negri, as a film, *Battle of Algiers* supports such a conservative project that aligns it with the project of classical political cinemas. The film I will discuss as a modern political film, however, presents an alternative political project within cinema. *Bab El-Oued City* by Merzak Allouache contains conflict, but rejects the oppositional project laid out by *Battle of Algiers*, not the least because it centers on a different historical moment. Remaining within the context of Algeria, *Bab El-Oued City* illustrates how in the context of increasing globalization and proliferation of identities, a modern political film provides a more apt political project.

As mentioned previously, I borrow this transition from a classical political cinema to a modern political cinema from Deleuze. Although in this chapter I situate this transition in context of third cinema and the creation of subjectivity in and through cinema, Deleuze's original discussion provides a useful ways to think about the construction of subjectivity. To briefly return to Deleuze's initial discussion in *Cinema 2*, his contemporary cinematic politics includes:

> A people that is *missing*, or the lack of a coherent identity that unifies the subjects of the film. (Deleuze 1989, 216);
> The collapse of boundaries that would separate private from public, political actions. (218);
> The proliferation of identities and struggles, rather than one identity being replaced by another. (220);
> Collective utterances that do not speak for a people, but speak for cooperation among people. (222)

While several of these points obviously contrast with the 'classical' political cinema, such as the lack of a coherent people and proliferation of multiple identities, it will be useful to extrapolate how these specific points contribute to modern political films in the context of the three films I examine here.

For now, I will save my discussion of a 'people that is missing' for my analysis of *Bab El-Oued City*, as I interpret this concept of a 'people to come' as a more holistic concept in regards to a particular film. The collapse of public and private realms, however, bears directly on definitions of the modern political film, and is clearly contrasted with *Battle of Algiers*. In fact, in *Battle of Algiers*, it is almost as if private life is removed entirely: there is no act that is not a public, political declaration. Even the acts of terrorism and Islamic marriage, which are hidden from the French public, are meant to be revealed as political statements belonging to the Algerian public. When first introducing the idea of a collapse between the public and private, Deleuze and Guattari write: “The individual concern . . . becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 17). This 'whole other story' indicates another side to *official* stories, one that becomes politicized by virtue of its alterity to dominant discourses, but also because private acts/spaces are overcoded by “commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical” influences (17). This interconnectedness, the private sphere with what we'd traditionally call parts of the public sphere, does not necessarily mean that private acts are now public, but that the ramifications of private acts become political in previously unthought ways. The revelation of these ramifications includes the construction of 'the whole other story' for

which the dominant discourse cannot account for. As I will show in *Bab El-Oued City*, Boualem's insomnia reveals a set of circumstances that reaches far beyond his personal psychology or physiology. With the collapse of boundaries separating the private from the political, the modern political film commits to exploring stories that run counter to dominant discourses, the stories often left untold, while revealing their political nature.

The proliferation of identities concerns the way modern political cinemas construct cinematic subjectivities. In *Battle of Algiers*, identities do not proliferate, they syndicate. Identities that do not belong within the confines of acceptable or representable identities within the film conform or are eliminated. As a result, *Battle of Algiers* may challenge historical accounts of the conflict in Algeria, but even in doing so it constructs molar representations of what it means to be Algerian, and even what it means to be French. Any historical myths countered by the film are just replaced by the myths *of* the film. Indeed, this is where much of the classical political cinema's efficacy comes from: the institution of a new myth to counter dominant or repressive forces. The modern political cinema, on the other hand, allows identity to proliferate to the point where it is difficult to define a 'people', or where such definitions must take into account the *possibility for difference*. Speaking of 'black American cinema' in the 1970's, Deleuze argues, “instead of replacing a negative image of the black with a positive one, [it] multiplies types and 'characters', and each time creates or re-creates only a small part of the image which no longer corresponds to a linkage of action, but to shattered states of emotions or drives” (Deleuze 1989, 220). By presenting a 'people' as multifaceted and full of possibility in terms of their subjective evolution, the modern political cinema rejects the impulse to

construct an 'alternative image' of a people by constructing a 'multitude of images' of a people. What is constructed, then, is not another myth about the people, but an entirely different process altogether. Each 'fragment' of this people now becomes a force that creates, disrupts, and reshapes our active consideration of this people. *Bab El-Oued City* follows *Battle of Algiers* in questioning what comprises an Algerian identity, and what comprises a French identity, but, because of their vastly different approaches to these definitions, *Bab El-Oued City* explicitly addresses the networks of communication that link Algeria to the outside world and the fragmenting force this outside connection introduces.

The last principle regarding the modern political cinema follows from this fragmentation of the 'people' and how a film speaks for this now fragmented people, which returns to the project Hardt and Negri set out in *Multitude*. The argument Deleuze begins, and Hardt and Negri follow, is that even though a people is fragmented, there still exists the possibility for a collective or cooperative enunciation. Put another way, this is the possibility for lateral socio-political organization. In the films of Ousmane Sembene and Glauber Rocha, Deleuze notes 'intercessors', characters who *intercede* in the telling of the cinematic story in order to disrupt this story or contribute *their own* fragment to it. This intercession takes place through 'speech-acts', or moments where the characters step in to take part in the story-telling, displacing the agency of an omniscient narrator – the voice-over narration in *Battle of Algiers*, for example. Speech-acts of these intercessors can be collective utterances, however, in that they help to construct a 'free indirect discourse' about the people being spoken for. In free indirect discourse, it

becomes difficult to pinpoint the source of narrative enunciation: it comes from the characters as intercessors, the director, the camera, the extra-cinematic reality on set, a film's history of production, and no single one of these. As a result, this narrative enunciation becomes collective, because no *one* person, or unified entity, is speaking for all of the people. This enables the lateral representation of a people to become possible, the necessary requirement for a cinematic Multitude. As Deleuze argues, "The speech-act has several heads, and, little by little, plants the elements of a people to come as the free indirect discourse of Africa about itself, about America or about Paris" (223-224). Insofar as viewers of the film agree that the various acts of story-telling in the film could be true, and that the intercessors could be real people, they comply with, perhaps even contribute to, a collective utterance about a people or a place and lay the grounds for cooperation among the constituents of this collectivity. That is not to say there is not conflict between the different members of this collective – as I will show, *Bab El-Oued City* contains a great deal of conflict – but the modern political film allows nuanced and collaborative articulations of a people *by* a people.

Deleuze ends his discourse on the modern political cinema by saying, "As a general rule, third world cinema has this aim: through trance or crisis, to constitute an assemblage which brings real parties together, in order to make them produce collective utterances as the prefiguration of the people who are missing" (224). Despite Deleuze's naming of 'third world cinema' here, this is not such a simple distinction as between 'first cinema' and 'third cinema', however, nor does it generate from specific directors, peoples, or locations around the world as a specific geopolitical project. Instead, it is a

distinction between political projects and the cinematic methods of carrying out these projects, though this project does suggest certain filmmakers are more likely to create films that fit this definition than others. When Deleuze finally articulates this 'general rule' of 'third world cinema', he actually names components of the modern political cinema as it exists within the greater tradition of film studies surrounding third cinema. I believe these connections between the modern political cinema and discourse of third cinema have significant implications for the emergence of a cinema more appropriate to the shifting geopolitical struggles involved in increasing globalization and political engagement with increasingly diverse populations. If a significant facet of political cinema lies in the representation of a people, as the third cinema writers I cite here argue it does, then attention to shifts in the composition of subjects provides the means for a political efficacy in cinema. I will provide a case study in *Bab El-Oued City* to illustrate the way it fragments subjectivity and opens out into a future-time of contingency.

***Bab El-Oued City*: What is a Proper Citizen?**

Writing of *Bab El-Oued City*, David Prochaska suggests,

> At first, *Bab el-Oued City* presents itself as a disquisition on daily life, la vie quotidienne, a “this is the way it is” essay on making one’s way in Algeria today that makes for a simultaneously kaleidoscopic and claustrophobic view of the working class Bab el-Oued neighborhood of Algiers. As a series of character sketches, it has people not politics (let alone revolutionary politics) occupy center stage. (Prochaska 2003, 138)

His initial assessment of the film accurately describes its generic nature as tending towards the neorealist in depicting 'la vie quotidienne'. The film follows a number of individuals inhabiting the Bab el-Oued neighborhood of Algiers, and seems apolitical in its focus on 'character sketches', particularly when placed side by side with *Battle of*

Algiers. Prochaska goes on to point out a number of real political events the film does not depict, nor seem to take into consideration. He does not blame Allouache, however, but "The opacity of political power, for one thing; what can (and cannot) be said, for another" (142). Not only are 'political events' often shrouded in mystery, Prochaska points to the suited men in BMWs that appear infrequently in *Bab El-Oued City*, but the veracity of facts are often torn apart by different political forces vying for support. I would also point to the dangerous environment Allouache worked in during the filming of *Bab El-Oued City*. Despite the fact that Allouache is an Algerian, he is also secular and resides in France, which puts him, and his production, at risk at a time where Islamic fundamentalism was on the rise. In fact, Allouache's friend, Tajar Djaout, was murdered during the filming of *Bab El-Oued City* for being a popular secularist writer, critical of both Islam and the Algerian military state, making this violence imminent to Allouache's own life. While all of these extra-cinematic factors should be taken into account, it is also possible, however, that Allouache chose not to focus on overtly political events in order not to detract from the more existential registers the film focuses on. By examining the more minor issues in regards to the existential experiences of individuals living in Algiers, Allouache reorients the film from a classical – overt and public – politics, to a more subtle modern politics centered on the formation, and fragmentation, of subjectivity.

Although *Bab El-Oued City* follows a whole cast of characters, describing the neighborhood in detail, Boualem takes the place of the protagonist as he incurs the wrath of a young fundamentalist named Said. In the Bab el-Oued neighborhood, the

Islamic community broadcasts sermons from a loudspeaker during the day. One of these loudspeakers is situated across from Boualem's bedroom. As a baker, however, Boualem works through the night and sleeps during the day. Despite attempts to block out the noise with pillows, the speaker keeps Boualem awake. Eventually, Boualem grows frustrated and, in a fit, tears the speaker down. Explaining to a friend later, Boualem complains, “the noise was eating away at my brain”. Though his actions are not necessarily religious in nature, he incurs the wrath of a group of young men in the Islamic community led by Said. Said and his band are mobilized, by Boualem's theft, to 'clean up the neighborhood' and find the culprit who has taken the speaker. Although Said is presented in the film as extremely religious, his violent brand of fundamentalism is not embraced by the local Imam. As a result, what entails has little do with Islam, and really focuses on the creation and intensification of an extremist subjectivity against the rest of the inhabitants of the Bab el-Oued neighborhood. Rather than affirming Said's progress in cleaning up the town, *Bab El-Oued City* works as a modern political film in three principle ways: first, through refusing to capitulate to a majoritarian impulse that would treat the subjects of Bab El-Oued as homogenous; second, by revealing a fundamentalism intolerable to the diverse citizens of Bab El-Oued; third, through a messianic form of time that refuses the arrival of a changed environment, which might gesture towards a new majoritarian formation. In these three aspects, the film operates quite differently from *Battle of Algiers* while still focusing on the regulation and production of subjectivity (through enforcing Islamic values and fragmenting notions of singular subject respectively) and raising political questions regarding the future of Algeria.

To illustrate the diversity of Algiers, the film introduces a number of characters with different desires, motivations, and goals, thereby fragmenting any notion of an Algerian national subject. It is significant, however, that an intense civil war contextualizes the story of *Bab El-Oued City*. Beginning in 1991, several years before Allouache began shooting his film, this civil war involved conflict between multiple pro-Islamist groups who eventually took up arms against a secular military state that shut down democratic elections when it appeared the Islamic Salvation Front was going to win a majority. Despite the fact that there seems to be clearly opposed sides in this historical conflict, there is no longer a 'national subject' being fought for. Accordingly, there exists no Islamic-Algerian union of subjects in *Bab El-Oued City* as we see in *Battle of Algiers,* considering Said's militancy distances him from the Imam. As part of this historical moment, *Bab El-Oued City* emerges at a time when democracy was becoming a possibility for the first time in Algerian history, despite fierce opposition from the military. The military's censorship of democracy, however, did little to repress the desire for democracy – indeed, Le Sueur points out that several terrorist groups promoted the re-institution of democratic elections. With the background of an emerging, yet repressed democracy, Allouache takes a different representational approach by eliding the big questions of this political confrontation altogether in what Prochaska noted as a seemingly apolitical approach. By doing so, he fragments clear understandings of 'Algerians', who, particularly to a global audience, might be identified as Islamic, violent, or non-democratic, because of the context of the civil war. By relegating this violent movement to a *fragment* of the population, the film reconsiders ideas of what it

means to be an Islamic militant in Algeria, and removes the idea that this is a *national* subjectivity. Messaoud, one of Said's cronies, is a useful case study in this regard.

Early in the film, Mabrouk, Boualem's friend and fellow baker, gives insight into Messaoud's position by greeting him, “Hi immigrant . . . Your beard is growing well”, which seems strange considering he has only been identified as belonging to Said's fundamentalist crowd until this point. What Mabrouk knows, and which is not revealed to the viewer until later, is that Messaoud is not from Algeria, not Islamic, and certainly not a fundamentalist. Eventually, Messaoud reveals his situation angrily when Mabrouk jests about his 'prayer robes', “I was stuck in Algiers, with no papers or anything, kicked out of France like an asshole”. It turns out that Messaoud is actually a French citizen, deported to a country he knows little about. Identified by his skin and dark complexion as 'Algerian', his deportation puts him in an alien environment. But, he continues, “It wasn't you [Mabrouk and company] who fed me! I slept three days, three weeks even, on cardboard behind the main post office. You know who took me in? The Imam. I'll never forget it”. In the end, Messaoud finally receives his replacement passport and leaves on a boat for France, giving Mabrouk these parting words, “I leave you Bab el-Oued, the sun, and the beach”. Just as Messaoud's hybrid identity reveals the fallacy of Said's attempt to homogenize the population of the city, the sequence that follows this exchange indicates a general desire amongst the citizens of Algiers for a new political reality. As Messaoud boards the boat, an upbeat yet mournful song begins to play with the accompanying lyrics: “I want to get out! I want to split... my country is a rose. They've destroyed it, wilted it. I cry over its sad fate”. As the song plays, the camera

pans slowly to the right to reveal a group of characters from the film looking on from a nearby terrace. The close up on their wishful gazes and accompanying lyrics illustrate a desire to leave on the same boat. The camera then cuts back to the boat, showing Boualem leaning on the railing of the ferry, a point I will return to shortly. After showing Boualem, the film cuts to another close up of more citizens of Bab el-Oued intently staring, and pans to the left to show the boat as the object of their gaze while it raises its gates, preparing for departure. This repeated connection between the desiring gazes of Bab el-Oued's inhabitants and the departure reveals the neighborhood's characters to be more complicated, here globally networked through hybridized identities and desires, even in characters initially marked out as 'Islamic fundamentalists'.

Whereas the revolution of *Battle of Algiers* is supremely national, with increasing globalization comes the fragmentation of previously 'national' subjects. The modern political films in this project illustrate a sensitivity to this fragmentation and acknowledgment of global flows. Of course, the fragmentation need not be due to globalization, but in *Bab El-Oued City* characters overwhelmingly express this desire for a wider connection to the world, illustrating underlying networks of desire. Messaoud and the scene of departure, while a useful case study, presents only a small facet of this in the film. Other global desires include Mabrouk's importing of goods unavailable in Algiers, characters invoking other global locations (“I'm off to Canada”/”Still dreaming of Marseilles?”), the expressed desire for foreign commodities such as BMWs and Mercedes, characters wearing foreign icons such as Mabrouk's

'Public Enemy' hat, imported books, women who speak of marrying foreign husbands so that they can leave Algiers, and French tourists returning to Algiers with nostalgia. Whereas the 'Other' is targeted for attack in *Battle of Algiers* in the bombing of French cafes and airports in order to cement an Algerian identity in control of the Algerian nation, in *Bab El-Oued City* desire for this otherness returns in order to inhabit and fragment the 'national' subject, even amongst Said's attempts to clean up the neighborhood and reassert the dominance of an Islamic subjectivity.

Rather than take politics as the primary focus of the film, as one might imagine a 'political film' to do, *Bab El-Oued City* follows the quotidian, seemingly apolitical experiences of its characters. This strategy, operating on a narrative level as it dwells on quotidian moments and formally as the camera lingers on everyday labors, defines all of the films in this project to a degree. This is not to say that they are boring, or that nothing happens, but that the causal narrative structure that replaces a situation, through action, with a changed situation does not occur, as discussed in the introduction. The focus on quotidian moments, however, works subtly in modern political films to reveal the interconnectivity between social, psychological, and economic factors that collapse private and political narratives. Boualem's inability to sleep and subsequent altercations with Said, for example, reverberates with this interconnectivity in *Bab El-Oued City.* As mentioned earlier, Boualem tears down the loudspeaker, because he cannot sleep while it broadcasts. Boualem sleeps while it broadcasts, however, because he sleeps during the day, due to his job at a bakery. As a result, this action is immediately connected to the economic sphere, and political realm of the greater economy of Algeria. Despite the fact

that Boualem must work at night, he is lucky, the viewer learns, to have the job. Other families cannot even afford housing for everyone in the family. One family, for example, rotates family members into a car to sleep at night. Mabrouk drops off hot croissants in the morning to Fatah, who sleeps in the car, later saying, “They're lucky to have that car”. Boualem asks, “There are 16 of them in 2 rooms?” “Eighteen”, Mabrouk replies. This vast overcrowding illustrates the economic situation of Algiers, but also directly links to Boualem's tearing down of the speaker in that the economic situation is the basic condition for the event in the first place. Le Sueur even suggests that this is not purely an economic situation, but a historical and political one as well, as the “anticolonial inheritance left to the youth could no longer mask years of corruption and stagnation represented by staggering unemployment and a deadening lack of opportunities” (Le Sueur 2003, 3). In addition to delineating various classes in the film, Boualem's ability to work also invokes social issues.

Yamina, Said's sister, expresses a desire to work in the film. As a part of Said's family, however, her role as a female is strictly confined, mostly by Said and his constant regulation under the banner of religion. Her strict position is defined early on in a conversation with her mother. As her mother fits her for clothing, she says, “I didn't realize. You're a woman now”, and Yamina replies, “Woman or girl, it's the same. Nothing has changed. We're still locked up”. The conversation continues with the mother suggesting that Yamina can go out 'like the other girls', which really means she can go to the mosque and to the baths, rather than wherever she wishes. Finally Yamina says, “You don't understand. I want to work. It would help us anyway”, to which the

mother replies, “What will help us, is that you marry well”. Yamina's desire to work expresses a desire that overflows the narrow coding enforced by her family and in particular her brother. One might also understand this coding as majoritarian, insofar as Said's attempt to force an Islamic subjectivity on the community is an attempt to construct a majoritarian discourse – even if the film simultaneously suggests that this is an impossibility. Yamina's private desire is also immediately political, as it invokes the state of the economy in Algeria at the time of the film and illustrates a social level of Boualem's work. Boualem tears down the loudspeaker, because he sleeps during the day, because he is a *man*, which affords him the right to work. In *Bab El-Oued City*, the seemingly simple act of tearing down the loudspeaker, while perhaps criminal, speaks on a variety of registers including the psychological, economic, and social: psychological, because 'the words eating at his brain' illustrates a basic difference to the Islamic subjectivities in the Bab el-Oued neighborhood; economic, because his actions illustrate a more systematic problem of unemployment in Algiers; and social, because his ability to work is defined in relation to the collective view of his gender. These public psychological, economic, and social factors precipitate the private 'whole other stories' not being told regarding basic experiences of people in Algeria, a focus, even in its quotidian register, of the modern political film.

Due to these networks of reciprocity between single actions and systemic structures, *Bab El-Oued City* begins to issue collective utterances about the Bab el-Oued neighborhood. In the “struggle with informatics”, Deleuze aligns 'speech-acts' with the act of storytelling, an act that has the potential to overturn majoritarian formations by

contributing something new to a stagnant discourse (Deleuze 1989, 270). The fragmentation of the people embodied in the characters with varying motivations construct speech-acts, which assume authorial agency in their ability to define an aspect of Bab el-Oued. These speech-acts are *acts*, in terms of of J.L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, because they are not only communicative, but *do* something as well when they assume narrative agency (Austin 1975). Characters become 'intercessors' as their statements can no longer be relegated to a character in a narrative, but take on an extra-cinematic existence in the act of story-telling. Yamina's statement of desire to work, in this regard, is a real statement that challenges already formed notions of what a woman can or cannot do. And because this statement addresses systemic concerns, not just private desires, it takes the form of a collective utterance. This is not just a statement of desire by one woman, but a statement of desire by many – other women in the filmic reality of *Bab El-Oued City* and real women living in Algiers. These speech-acts become collective not only in that the one can be substituted for the many, however, but also in that they pave the way for a more cooperative environment by allowing other statements to co-exist. Whereas *Battle of Algiers* settles on a Schmittian dichotomy, *Bab El-Oued City* paves the way for a more lateral social organization by constructing a multiplicity of desires and identities in the cinematic space.

The speech-acts of *Bab El-Oued City* indicate the filmic and pro-filmic production of subjectivity, because they example the creation of new subjects beyond the majoritarian limits of the film. Whereas Said in the film, and the various fundamentalist groups in 1990's Algeria outside of the film, posit a particular subject as proper to the future of

Algeria, these speech-acts take part in the process of producing new subjects altogether. This production can be said to be 'biopolitical', because it directly addresses ways of living and being in Algeria (not to mention issues of race and nationality, as Mabrouk illustrates). When Deleuze writes “if there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet. . . *the people are missing*”, he speaks first of this fragmentation of the people (Deleuze 1989, 216). The people that is missing is the 'unified subject' of the classical political cinema. He also speaks, however, of a 'people to come', which will arrive to fill this void. In *Cinema 2*, he suggests that the 'story-telling' speech-acts of characters will invent a people in order to fill this void, “an act of story-telling which would not be a return to myth but production of collective utterances. . . the invention of a people . . . Not the myth of a past people, but the story-telling of the people to come” (222-223). The political project of rendering a 'people to come' in Deleuze's discussion is vague, however, other than it will counter hegemonic understandings of a people. Following the principles of the modern political film that I have outlined previously, I argue that the 'people to come' is less a 'people' and more the production of diverse peoples that characterize the 1990's and forward. Or, in other words, films that focus on the invention of a people depict the production of subjectivity on screen, without attempting to harness that subjectivity toward a particular end, as is done in *Battle of Algiers*. This intimates a new political mode, which cannot claim a particular solution as its goal. Instead, the fragmentation of the people, the attention to the politicized aspects of individual lives, their collective utterances brought into the forum of the film, and the prefiguration of a 'people to come' all lay the grounds for a questioning of who a people is and what political direction should be taken. Given the

context of *Bab El-Oued City,* filmed in the midst of a violent upheaval after the promise of democracy has been challenged, the possibility for the formation of new subjects is directly relevant to the film.

Bab El-Oued City does not end on an optimistic note in this regard. While the possibility for democracy remains the concern of the film, its conclusion does not reveal the means to make democracy a possibility. After a violent conflict between Said and Boualem, Ouardya, an acquaintance of Boualem's, suggests they leave the country and that she has the money to do so. As the initiator of conflict in this film, Boualem's departure is significant, and marks his realization of the intolerable situation that has emerged in Algiers. Rather than attempting to settle matters democratically between the constituents of the Bab el-Oued neighborhood, Boualem evacuates, signaling an end to any sort of democratic process that may have been possible. Boualem's departure is mirrored by the Imam's as well, who broadcasts over a newly-installed loudspeaker:

> Everything is clear now. Some people, among us, don't want peace in this neighborhood. Some people among us, and our children, want discord. Violence breeds violence. There will be no more peace in Bab el-Oued. Is this what we teach our children? . . . I've decided to leave this place of hatred . . . I want to warn you: You are responsible for what will happen in the future.

The Imam's closing note warns that the well-being of Bab el-Oued is a question of the people to come, of whether or not an existence where differences can be acknowledged without violence can be established 'in the future'. Before leaving, Boualem promises Yamina, a romantic interest at this point, that he will return one day, telling her, “I'll come back for you”. During Yamina's voice-over narration that concludes the film, however, it is clear that Boualem has not returned. She narrates:

> Boualem, if you could see how Bab el-Oued has changed, like all the neighborhoods. Death prowls among us. Fear is constant. We observe a curfew. My brother Said is dead. He was gone for months. They found him in the morgue. Often I asked your brother what country you went to. He never answered me. Neither did your sister, Hanifa. Maybe they don't know. So I write and hide these letters. I'll give them to you when you come back.

While Yamina's non-diegetic narration proceeds, the viewer watches her brother Said making his way down a cliff towards a secluded beach. After looking around, to make sure he is alone, he pulls a pistol out of his jacket, a symbol, but also material effect, of the increasing violence in Bab el-Oued. He cocks the pistol, aims out at the water, and shoots. At the moment of the shot, the film cuts to a more direct angle on Said, and zooms in to a close up on his determined face. He shoots again and the film cuts to a close-up of the gun, while another round from the gun brings an extreme close-up on Said's face. As he finishes firing off the round, one of the 'suited men' Prochaska notes, who earlier gave Said this firearm, looks out over the cliff at Said. If Prochaska is correct, and these suited men in BMWs are agents of the state, the film suggests that this fundamentalism is not only linked, but somehow encouraged by the military regime controlling Algeria in the 1990's. While this scene serves to formally intensify the escalating violence that the viewer must now assume is the future of Bab el-Oued, it also suggests that, despite the presence of an epilogue, which would seem to suggest a changed situation as in *Battle of Algiers,* nothing has changed at all. The fundamentalism and military dictatorship still typify the dominant regimes in Algeria.

Yamina's voice-over during this epilogue suggests Boualem's potential return, concluding the film by by opening up to a form of messianic time characterized by Yamina's endless waiting. This refusal of narrative conclusion rejects the causal, closed

time of films that operate according to a sensory-motor schemata. *Battle of Algiers,* in contrast, provides narrative closure through an epilogue that explains the final (successful) results of the revolutionary action depicted throughout the film. While the open ended nature of the film gestures towards a 'people to come', the context of *Bab El-Oued City* and the civil war occurring in Algeria at the time suggests that the modern political film does not always end on a positive note. In *Bab El-Oued City*, instead, the modern political film focuses its political critique around the intolerable violence in Algiers, thereby not suggesting a particular future, a new majoritarian formation, but rather creating a viewing environment ripe for political discussion and desires to emerge. Yamina's conclusion is an elegy for democracy, and reflects the escalating violence in Algeria at the time – what Le Sueur calls the "phase of absolute terror," which lasted from 1992-1998 (Le Sueur 2003, 5). Yamina's waiting, while personal in its relation to Boualem's potential return, also manifests the larger, political desire for democracy that characterized this point in Algeria's history, as shown through the diverse subjects the film depicts. At the time of *Bab El-Oued City*'s filming and release, 1993-1994, however, there was little room for optimism. Even so, *Bab El-Oued City*'s political strength lies in its representational strategies as a modern political film. Rather than construct a field of a select few identities vying for dominance, it elaborates a whole network of desires bubbling about the surface of the city.

The Intolerability of Violence

Battle of Algiers, Outside the Law, and *Bab El-Oued City* constitute a relation between two very different politico-cinematic projects. Both center on conflict and political struggle, but their difference illustrates an attention to particular historical moments and

political desires. *Battle of Algiers* depicts an anti-colonial struggle, with the primary goal being emancipation from the colonial state of France. With this specific goal in mind, the film creates a polarized account centering on conflict and the constitution of a new national subject. *Bab El-Oued City*, on the other hand, was filmed when the potential for democracy was emerging in Algeria. This potential democracy is represented in the film by the proliferation of identities, some cooperating and some coming into conflict. While the film's representational strategies allow the possibility of democracy, the film ultimately argues that democracy was only on the horizon for the people of Algeria. *Outside the Law* presents a mixture of these two films, with characters displaying revolutionary fervor, and others preferring the inter-national and capitalist fragmentation of identity. The respective outcomes of each film are due primarily to their formal and representational strategies, which are reflected in the political content of the films. The representational strategies constitute a larger political and cinematic project carried forward by film scholars working in the discourse of third cinema, which develops along the lines of the classical political cinema on one end and the modern political cinema on the other.

The classical political film and modern political film are opposed in that they operate according to differing representational strategies, but they are not teleological despite what their names, and my somewhat historical analysis, suggests. The modern political film presents what I believe to be some of third cinema's most interesting features. Through its production of difference, it lays the ground for a cinematic Multitude to emerge – a set of differing identities that may, nevertheless, come together in

cooperation for shared positive change. The modern political film, as I have defined it here, is also an ethical cinema in that it examples the possibility of coexistence and cooperation for the spectators of these films. It allows the individual viewer freedom to be and become other, without directing the viewer *who* or *how* to become, as is done in the classical political cinema. This cinematic ethics has the potential to engender subjective change in its spectators, by revealing the intolerability of conflict and forced conformity to a species that often differs on a biopolitical (biologically, culturally, politically, religiously, existentially) scale. *Bab El-Oued City* does this especially well through its representation of a multifaceted people in the face of conflict from a military state and Islamic extremism. Although it ends not with the acceptance of these identities, but with the open-ended wait for a more democratic existence, it establishes this wait *as intolerable*. The type of conflict required to throw off the colonial state no longer applies, and by making pain caused by 'classical' struggles, Said in his efforts to reform the city, unbearable to the point that it drives citizens out of the city, *Bab El-Oued City* communicates the immediate necessity for a new politics that can accept difference.

The Islamic-Iranian Subject and Bahman Ghobadi's Networks of Resistance

While the previous chapter suggests that a 'modern politics' is more appropriate to address multi-faceted struggles in the era of the networks and globalization, as opposed to a classical politics that supports the formation of a particular (national or religious) subject, this chapter turns to the difficulty in positing the 'nation' as a center at all. While this project is built around particular national locales, and nations are even involved firsthand in certain instances – the censorship in Iran and China, as I will address further in the next chapter – these struggles are often between different discursive communities that do not belong to the 'nation'. Instead, a minor subject position comes from within a dominant discourse, thereby fragmenting and critiquing majoritarian notions by exposing an other story the discourse cannot or does not want to account for. When Deleuze and Guattari first articulated their concept of the minor using Kafka, their interest rested in how Kafka's writing undermines a more dominant or standard literary mode. As a I argued in the previous chapter, films that operate this way continue along the lines of third cinema, but the ultimate goal of the modern political film is to elucidate the position of groundless identities – those without nation states and political representation to speak for them. Deleuze addresses this relationship between political films and dominant discourses in *Cinema 2*: “The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims 'There have never been people here', the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves, in shanty towns and camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute” (Deleuze 1989, 217). This does not mean the institution of a new discourse as in a classical politics, “a return to myth”, but the fragmentation of the dominant discourse to the point of “a production of

collective utterances" (222). In this chapter, the modern political films of Bahman Ghobadi prompt a fluctuation in Iranian identity as posited by the Iranian state. These fluctuations allow the space for Kurdish-Iranian subject to emerge, but are taken even further by allowing an even more fragmented diversity to emerge within Tehran, despite official regulations that restrict perceived global-desires.

In post-1979 Iran, the governing Islamic Republic constitutes the majoritarian discourse both within the filmmaking environment of Iran and in society more generally. Since 1979, Islamic ideology has been enforced as a national ethos, often judicially. That is not to say that 'Islamic ideology' is a simple thing – its heterogeneity is shown in the discrepancy used in issuing exhibition permits, for example, or the impact personnel changes have had on policy, as Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad notes in particular (Zeydabadi-Nejad 2010) – but many laws in post-revolution Iran make recourse to Islamic ideology as a *grounds* for their validity – Sharia being enforced in films, for example. Like the classical political project of *Battle of Algiers* in the previous chapter, the state uses film regulation to promote a particular, Islamic subject. As a result, these regulations operate as a form of biopower, structuring the creation of subjects and ways of living in contemporary Iran. It is not too difficult to locate exactly how Islamic ideology affects the production of cinema in Iran, with the caveat that it is often difficult to determine why particular choices are made by censorship boards in enforcing these ideologies (an argument I have made previously regarding Bahman Farmanara; Holtmeier 2012). There are a number of directions from which modern political films in Iran begin to fragment this dominant discourse. Examples include fragmentary narratives that

challenge official histories, the increasing presence of Kurds and Kurdistan in Iranian media, films banned due to their expressions of 'illegal' ideas in Iranian society, and feminist films that are sometimes banned, and sometimes pass under the radar, but are always revelatory. The number of these interests alone reveals the impossibility of a single, restrictive program that defines Iranian Cinema. I focus in particular on the presence of Kurds and Kurdistan in Bahman Ghobadi's films, as well as the director's extension of his politics to the fragmentation amongst non-Kurds in Tehran. I focus on Ghobadi, because of his interest in particular subjects that perceive the Islamic Republic's attempt to control peoples and territories as intolerable, and in doing so fragment the notion of a coherent Iranian subject, but also his insight into the increasingly 'borderless' understanding of the world for both Kurds and Iranians more generally.

The political mode of Ghobadi's later films follows from the way he interrupts otherwise linear narratives using music and 'sound-situations' respectively. While taking different form in each of the films I discuss here, Ghobadi uses these formal strategies to evoke an alternative form of time that reach beyond the causal connections of a sensory-motor schemata. In *Half-Moon* (2006), these breaks are part of psychological sound-situations that afflict the protagonist of the film, heralding his immanent death. In actually depicting the final events of the film, before its actual conclusion, these premonitory moments allow a glimpse into the future-time of the film and constantly interrupt the progression of the narrative. In *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (2009), intermittent music videos detail the daily lives of individuals in Tehran, depicting a

multitude of subjects despite state laws that attempt to contain what types of subjects are allowed in Iran. The music itself, however, also attests to this diversity as it stands alongside, and equal to, traditional Iranian music in Tehran, though so called 'Western' music is banned. While these aural ruptures fragment the linearity of Ghobadi's narratives, they also engage in a form of biopolitical production by fragmenting notions of a particular 'national' subject and revealing a diversity of different individuals within Iran. Despite the banning of these films, as they reject the regulation of subjectivity required by the Iranian state, Ghobadi also prompts biopolitical production for viewers of these films as they encourage the formation of extra-national communities inside Iran. Ghobadi's release of *No One Knows About Persian Cats* online for free to the citizens of Iran suggests political motivation in this respect. As two of his more pessimistic films, *Half-Moon* and *No One Knows About Persian Cats* also both end with deaths, juxtaposing this productive argument for biopolitical production with something intolerable about contemporary Iranian society. In light of the focus of these films on subjectivity, I argue what these films find intolerable is the attempt of the state to wield a regulatory biopower in the forming of proper Islamic-Iranian subjects. These films, in turn, suggest the inability to control the desires of populations through the wielding of biopower and censorship in modern Iran.

The 1979 Revolution, Censorship, and Cinema

> Because the direct gaze of desire was
> prohibited after the 1979 revolution, the averted,
> unfocused look has been predominant in film ever since.
> *Hamid Naficy* (1994)

To understand the role censorship plays in constructing particular subject-positions in

Iranian film, and why Ghobadi's films articulate a modern politics, one must first understand the events of 1979 in Iran and current Islamic positions towards Iranian film. In 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Pahlavi monarchy that had held power in Iran for 54 years, presenting an almost entirely antithetical political platform. Whereas the Shah promoted westernization and rapid modernization, Khomeini preached religious foundations for society. As a result of deteriorating socio-economic conditions in Iran, the Ayatollah was able to overthrow the Shah with popular support. Once in power, the Ayatollah established an Islamic doctrine for the country and began to construct a dominant ideology aligned with Islam. Effects on cinema appeared immediately, beginning with actions such as the institution of the Sharia – laws that govern the public appearance of women – but the enforcement of the Sharia on Iranian films is only a small part of how this new ideological force changed cinema in Iran. While the Iranian New Cinema, that arrived after the revolution, resulted from particular restrictions placed on Iranian Cinema by censors, I argue that it is part of a larger program dedicated to the construction of a particular Islamic-Iranian subject, and thus constitutes an attempt to effect a particular population through disciplinary methods. As an attempt to create a norm for the Iranian population, however, this majoritarian discourse contains minoritarian elements that expose its hidden or suppressed stories as shown through the films of Ghobadi in this chapter.

Describing the most immediate effects of the 1979 Revolution on the production of film in Iran, Hamid Dabashi argues: “The development of Iranian cinema came to a standstill immediately after the revolution. The organs of the Islamic Republic actively used the

medium for their own propaganda purpose. The state poured millions of dollars into films that supported and consolidated the revolution" (Dabashi 2001, 32). Supporting the transition Dabashi describes, Khomeini set the stage for how film would be viewed after the revolution with a series of proclamations about the medium of film itself. Although film already held a tenuous position amongst religious groups in Iran before the revolution, Khomeini made these beliefs a public position. Hamid Naficy quotes Ayatollah Khomeini in saying that "cinema and other manifestations of westernization (theatre, dancing and mixed-sex swimming) 'rape the youth of our country and stifle in them the spirit of virtue and bravery'" (Naficy 2002, 27). Cinema presents a danger for Khomeini, because of its power to transport the western world directly into Iran where it would threaten Islamic values. Even more significant, Naficy shows that Khomeini was a "proponent of the hypodermic theory of ideology", which suggests that ideology may be 'injected' into people through cultural products such as foreign cinema (28). Following the 'hypodermic theory' of ideology, Islamic law banned Western products, but it is important to note that Khomeini did not oppose cinema technology itself, "The cinema is a modern invention that ought to be used for the sake of educating the people, but as you know, it was used instead to corrupt our youth. It is the misuse of cinema that we are opposed to" (29). Instead of importing foreign entertainment, Khomeini advocated the spread of Islam through film technology and its use to steel a particular Islamic subject. In order to align the use of film technology with Islamic principles, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was established and charged with the task of developing regulations for how film technology could be used and monitoring film productions created within Iran.

To enforce these regulations, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance required directors interested in producing a film inside of Iran to first submit a script and receive an exhibition permit for their film. The Ministry verifies that films work in accordance with Islamic law by ensuring it adheres to a set of regulations. For example, authorities will forbid an exhibition permit include films that:

> weaken the principle of monotheism and other Islamic principles or insult them in any manner;
> insult, directly or indirectly, the Prophets, Imams, the guardianship of the Supreme Jurisprudent (*velayat faqih*), the ruling Council or the jurisprudents (*mojtaheds*);
> blaspheme against the values and personalities held sacred by Islam and other religions mentioned in the Constitution (37)[2]

Naficy also makes the point that while "Clearly these regulations codify… Islamic values", the "regulations themselves contain many ambiguities" (37). Zeydabadi-Nejad agrees, suggesting that filmmakers are not simply rejected by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, but that they must *negotiate* with Ministry authorities in order to earn exhibition for their films (Zeydabadi-Nejad 2010). So while the filmmaker attempting to obtain an exhibition permit may know the regulations quite well, how to navigate them remains a challenge. Additionally, the meaning a member of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance makes from a particular scene may be far different from what the director intended, making it a doubly difficult task. As a result, particular styles of filmmaking have emerged that work around the regulations in order to make it easier to attain exhibition permits. An example of these unique qualities that emerged in Iranian film after the revolution include what Naficy has called a "unique system of

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[2] See also Sadr 2006 for a more detailed, historical discussion, as censorship has long played a role in Iran.

looking" (Naficy 1994, 143).

What Naficy refers to as a 'unique system of looking' formally delineates Iranian cinema from other films around the world, considering the importance of looking and the gaze in cinema. Naficy traces the reason for this back to the constitution of Islamic law in general, and what he calls, with an appropriately named subtitle, 'The Constitution of the Self and of Vision' (136). The 'self' for Iranians, Naficy argues, splits between an outer, malleable self and an inner, pure self, and as a result "necessitates a boundary zone—however amorphous and porous—which can be thought of as a veil or a screen" enabling "strategies [which] are used in Iran to hide what is most pure and valued—the inner self. Veiling thus is operative within the self and is pervasive within the culture" (136). Contrary to Laura Mulvey's original argument in "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema", the gaze does not arrest and objectify women in this context. Not only does the veil literally block the gaze directed at Iranian women, Iranian women also

> have a great deal of latitude in how they present themselves to the gaze of the male onlookers, involving body language, eye contact, types of veil worn, clothing worn underneath the veil, and the manner in which the veil itself is fanned open or closed at strategic moments to lure or to mask, to reveal or to conceal the face, the body, or the clothing underneath. (137)

And while this describes Iranian culture outside of cinema as well, this particular system of looking has replaced dominant forms of cinematic looking that previously may have been imported from foreign (Hollywood) films. Even if this type of look was part of Iranian culture before the revolution, the restrictions – as Naficy argues in the epigraph above – forced on Iranian cinema also forced this alternative gaze into Iranian cinema as well.

While this 'unique system of looking' that has replaced the dominant cinematic language of Hollywood seems to be an ideal candidate to present a rupture in a majoritarian cinematic practice, I want to be careful about what constitutes a 'majoritarian discourse' when working in a global context. If we were to look at all of cinema, perhaps this unique system of looking does present a minoritarian rupture, but to argue this relies on a relation to Hollywood that posits Hollywood as the center of the cinematic universe. This glosses over the particularities of the Iranian context, and I argue instead that this unique system of looking actually forms an aspect of the majoritarian mode of Iranian cinema, because it emerges from the Islamic doctrine that has shaped current Iranian cinema through the Islamic Republic's rules and regulations. In other words, this aesthetic operates according to the major or dominant ideology of post-revolution Iran. As such, Naficy's point that the regulations 'codify Islamic values' takes on more significance than the formal style presented in the film: it also concerns that construction of a more total Islamic-Iranian subject with this system of looking as one component amongst others, such as the use of didactic narratives, reluctance to fund or accept films from 'rural' filmmakers, and the censorship of perceived Western and non-Islamic values. As Negar Mottahedeh argues of the 'tactile' gaze of Iranian cinema, “the act of looking transforms the viewer's identity... the act of looking collapses the distance between the subject who sees and the subject looked at” (Mottahedeh 2008, 9). If, in the Iranian context, film has the power to transform individuals, and individual subjectivities, then I am interested here in how modern political films can articulate spaces outside of the standard Islamic-Iranian subject position favored by film

regulations in Iran, and instead articulate a more complicated subject than these regulations would otherwise suggest.

Iranian cinema provides a useful context for examining the role of majoritarian discourses, and how modern political films can fragment the normalizing function of such a discourse, because it reveals that ideological overcoding does not necessarily stem from a center. In the context of Iran, this overcoding is both religious, like the construction of an Islamic-Algerian subject in the previous chapter, and part of the operation of the Iranian state, as will be true of the People's Republic of China in the next chapter. I will spend the rest of this chapter focusing on the films of Bahman Ghobadi, whose films similarly reveal several sources of political critique. Namely, the Kurds in his so called 'rural' films and the musical communities of Tehran. Ghobadi's films are uncharacteristically uniform in the way they construct emergent communities through discussion of Kurdish peoples, music, and a play with time that merges cinematic form and subject identity.

Interrupted Journeys: Bahman Ghobadi's Musical Travels

> I always insist that I am a normal, cultural
> Kurd fighting for the rights of the oppressed
> Kurdish children and their parents... The
> ones that are always seen in extreme longshots.
> *Bahman Ghobadi*

The start of Ghobadi's career is popularly referred to as his work on Abbas Kiarostami's *The Wind Will Carry Us (*1999). Although Ghobadi had started his filmmaking before – even referring to his camera work as a child in an interview with Peter Scarlet (Scarlet 2007) – Kiarostami's celebrity as 'the great Iranian director' seems to have a

gravitational pull when discussing Iranian cinema. Regardless, Kiarostami and Ghobadi's friendship is a poignant way to define Ghobadi as a director because of their public disagreement in 2009. After Kiarostami admonished Ghobadi for criticizing the Iranian state, Ghobadi released an open letter to the press, attacking Kiarostami for 'not being political enough'. Despite Ghobadi's extra-filmic activity, his films are not overtly political. Rather than, for example, constructing the Kurds as an oppositional class, he sets seemingly personal stories amidst Kurdish territories. While there are a number of directors who focus on Kurds, Kurdistan, and Kurdish issues, Bahman Ghobadi is unique in that he is the only *Iranian* director that focuses almost exclusively on the Kurdish peoples. Other Iranian directors have made the Kurds the subject of their films, such as Samira Makhmalbaf with *Blackboards* (2000), but Ghobadi's films are instead Kurdish-Iranian films – Kurdish due to their geopolitical boundaries, the topics and stories depicted, and the individuals who create them; Iranian in their funding, production, and the regulations they must adhere to. The Kurdish political mode that I address in *Half-Moon* is mirrored in Ghobadi's later film, *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, despite the fact that this latter film focuses predominantly on non-Kurdish subjects. I argue, however, that Ghobadi adopts the political mode articulated in his earlier films about Kurds to the political struggles of the Iranian people more broadly in relation to the regulation of subjectivity. A circular movement in Ghobadi's films defines this political aesthetic, which reveals networks of individuals, but also something intolerable, here death, that interrupts a movement that might lead to the articulation of a people independent from the Iranian state.

Speaking of media outlets such as the BBC and CNN, and world leaders such as George Bush and Tony Blair, Ghobadi defines his cinema as being about 'the people' that go unnoticed rather than events covered by the media and spoken of by leaders of nations. Ghobadi takes part in the well established tradition of using non-professional actors in his films to create a realism and focus on everyday lives of ordinary people, but he also takes this particular brand of aesthetic realism further: “I believe the scripts of my films are not totally mine. Fifty percent is mine and fifty percent comes from the actors” (Ghobadi 2002). He not only casts non-professional actors, but allows them to act as agents in the telling of their own stories – Ghobadi casts intercessors that defy subsumption by the script. While this is certainly an aesthetic choice, Ghobadi also shows that it is also part of a larger political strategy by claiming that “Kurdistan has not been realized yet” (Ghobadi 2002). Pragmatically speaking, this is true of their status as a nationless people, but it also indicates an emergent population – a people to come. While the Kurds have concrete traditions and culture, they have not established themselves as a political entity, nor branded their cultural products such as Iran has done with its own cinema. Ghobadi sees an emergent trend, however, highlighting the recent successes of Kurdish-Iranian short films in regional film festivals.

Unsurprisingly, the Iran-Iraq war and political tensions between Iran and Iraq are common issues in Ghobadi's films, and all of his feature films prior to *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (2009) – *A Time for Drunken Horses* (2000), *Marooned in Iraq* (2002), *Turtles Can Fly* (2004), and *Half-Moon* – take place along the Iran-Iraq border. As a result, Ghobadi's films deal with a particular 'space' that plays out in his films, but

reflects a real space along national borders. Often these films deal with displacement and movement resulting from conflict between Iran and Iraq – landmines and smuggling in *A Time for Drunken Horses*, restricted travel across borders in *Marooned in Iraq*, orphaned and war-injured children in *Turtles Can Fly*, and more border-crossing issues in *Half-Moon*. *Turtles Can Fly* most explicitly addresses the Iran-Iraq conflict, but in all of Ghobadi's films the war exists as a backdrop that the characters traverse without much attention being drawn to its purpose or origin (border disputes between Iran and Iraq and religious unrest). Instead, for the Kurds, smuggling and sneaking across borders is an everyday difficulty as they travel Kurdistan, a land cut through with borders enforced by nations that simultaneously claim and disavow the Kurdish populations. As a result, Kurds in Ghobadi's films often lead a nomadic lifestyle while crossing the 'smooth space' of Kurdistan, whether it be to go to work, come to the aid of a family member, or hold a concert in a Kurdish cultural center on the other side of the Iran-Iraq border. I am not saying that Ghobadi attempts to downplay the effects of these disputes on the Kurdish peoples, but rather that he shows how integral they are to modern Kurdish life with a blunt realism. For Ghobadi, “The two defining features of Kurdish life are suffering and hardship”, but Kurds have adapted to their harsh realities (Ghobadi 2002). This border crossing and movement lends the films a particular aesthetic centered on movement and traversing endless roads, stopped only by borders or Kurdish settlements, in a particular stylized locomotion that connects Kurdish peoples in the form of 'rhizomatic group affiliations' (Naficy 2001, 6-7). Rather than focusing on cultural centers, like the city of Sanandaj, Ghobadi films the landscapes, outposts, and crossroads of Kurdistan. While his later film, *No One Knows About*

Persian Cats, remains in Tehran for the entirety of the film, it too focuses on movement amongst various locations in the city, from the outskirts of the city, to skyscrapers under development, to the neighborhoods and the heart of the city itself. In each case, this movement shows a population to be intimately connected in some way: the Kurds through shared culture and the youth of Tehran through a shared desire for musical expression.

In addition to the actual movement of the Kurds in Ghobadi's films, musical celebrity also points toward the Kurdish people's 'rhizomatic group affiliations'. In *Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Naficy describes the ways transnational cinemas resist incorporation into dominant networks of filmmaking: “one may create paranoid structures and citadel cultures of withdrawal or may engage in rhizomatic group affiliations—vertical, horizontal, and transverse—across deterritorialized social formations” (6-7). In Ghobadi's films, the Kurdish communities seem to be intricately connected, rather than shut off from one another despite physical distance and borders erected by the surrounding nations. This is often exemplified through shared cultural knowledge and musical celebrities – Mirza in *Marooned in Iraq* and Mamo in *Half-Moon* – across these borders. Each film shares scenes where the protagonists enter tea-houses in remote locations and are greeted either by name, or by patrons of the tea-house spreading the news: “look, it is Mirza!” or “this is Mamo, put on his tape!” These displays of recognition are significant considering these films were created and take place prior to the establishment of specifically Kurdish satellite television stations in 2007 (Semati 2008, 106). Additionally, in each case, the arrival of the musical star does

not evoke sensational outbursts from the tea-house patrons, but a general approval from the crowd and a sense that Mirza or Mamo's arrival was inevitable, or at least not surprising. For the nomadic Kurds of these films, the musical stars are not beyond the Kurdish people as the super-celebrities of Hollywood, but are an immanent part of their culture connecting Iranian-Kurds and Iraqi-Kurds to Kurdistan through a biopolitical network.

While the journeys of the characters in Ghobadi's films construct the notion of a Kurdistan that crosses borders yet still exists, it is important to note that their journeys never come to a clear conclusion. At some point, the journeys are interrupted either before reaching their goal – *Half-Moon* and *No One Knows About Persian Cats* – or a goal is reached, but it is not the intended goal – *Marooned in Iraq*. In a study on 'cinematic journeys' Dimitris Eleftheriotis defines “two broad interconnected and often combined types of mobile vision that offer evocative comparisons with specific instances of cinematic movement”: “A steady, smooth and continuous movement of more-or-less linear direction” and “A circular type of movement around specific objects of interest” (Eleftheriotis 2010, 31). Further defining these two types of movements, Eleftheriotis explains, “In the first case a sense of destination, purpose and direction underpins the movement. In the second type a sense of completion informs the comprehensive observation of an object or event” (32). These broad characterizations of cinematic movement are useful descriptors for Ghobadi's films, especially Eleftheriotis's argument that these movements are 'often combined'. Ghobadi's films – particularly *Half-Moon* and *No One Knows About Persian Cats* – are set up with the pretense that

they will be linear journeys with purpose and direction, but through the film the audience realizes that they are not about the 'destination', but the journey itself. Ghobadi himself has said that the plot is "just an excuse to take the audience around and show them different corners of Kurdistan" (Ghobadi 2002). In other words, what seems like purposeful direction ends up being the circular 'observation' of Kurds and Kurdistan. Ghobadi uniquely plays with this movement in his films, however: though specifics are different in each film, the goals of individual characters or the 'circular completion' is always thwarted. I will address two of these examples in this chapter: Mamo never arrives at his concert in *Half-Moon*, and Negar and Ashkan never escape to London to play their music in *No One Knows About Persian Cats*. The interruption of the characters' journeys in these films points at something Ghobadi finds intolerable in contemporary Iranian society: that Kurdistan may be explored and postulated, but never officially proclaimed as autonomous – or following this logic in *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, that other musical genres can be explored, but these genres may not be integrated into one's identity and freely expressed.

The seemingly meandering path of the protagonists in *Half-Moon* and *No One Knows About Persian Cats,* however, are not the same as the protagonist's 'Sunday drive' through an industrial site in Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry.* On the other hand, neither do they promote a distinct Kurdish film aesthetic, another discourse that might claim representation for all Kurds or present another 'myth' as Deleuze might put it. Instead, Ghobadi elaborates a cinematic experience on multiple levels that describes the daily conditions of Iranian-Kurds and their relationship with Kurdistan. First, he establishes a

landscape that is not striated in strictly delineated spaces, but a smooth yet textured space where boundaries are felt, though still able to be crossed. Second, he invokes Kurdish movement and musical celebrity that constructs rhizomatic and biopolitical networks across the space of his films. Finally, he presents a particular form of cinematic time based on the wandering of his characters, but that is also marked by aural ruptures. Addressing these three facets of Ghobadi's films, I examine two of his later films, *Half-Moon* and *No One Knows About Persian Cats.* These two films focus on different 'people' in Iranian society that the current regime restricts through laws that codify what subjectivities are allowed in post-revolution Iran. *Half-Moon* shows the importance of Kurdistan, despite its status as a non-nation, and locates a cross-borders network of Kurdish subjects despite the contentious relationship the surrounding nations have with Kurdistan. *No One Knows About Persian Cats* looks to musicians in Tehran to show the importance of individual subjectivity in modern Iranian society as illustrated through the desire to play, and shape one's identity around, global music traditions. By revealing the multitude of different subjects within Iran, Ghobadi's films fragment concepts of a singular, hegemonic Iranian subject.

Kurdish Meta-Narrative and Sound Situations in *Half-Moon*

> To me, border is a nonsensical, grim, and disgusting word... it's something imposed on us. It is thanks to these borders that the four Kurdish regions have always lived in deprivation.
>
> *Bahman Ghobadi*

Half-Moon, Ghobadi's second film about musicians on a journey, follows Mamo as he gathers his sons for a concert in Iraqi-Kurdistan. Along the way, Mamo also picks up a female singer named Hesho, an act that defies the ban on female singers in Iran. The

entourage faces many diversions and setbacks along the way, but they eventually make contact with Niwemang (Half-Moon), who, like some sort of metaphysical creature, appears on the top of their moving tour bus to lead them to their concert. Two formal features of this film explicate the Kurdish experience, while communicating the minor position of the Kurds within Iran: first, the exploratory nature of movement amongst the Kurdish countryside, as described previously, combined with Mamo's musical celebrity, which elaborates a (bio)network composed of Kurdish subjects; second, the 'sound situations' that punctuate and interrupt the narrative, which are particular to *Half-Moon* and indicative of a non-linear form of time. Each of these points constitute significant political acts, without appeal to a confrontation between subjects or traditional revolution. The movement of Mamo – 'uncle' in Kurdish – and his sons as they cross borders to hold a Kurdish concert, combined with Mamo's musical celebrity, reveals a rhizomatic network linking the Kurdish countryside, spanning Iranian- and Iraqi-Kurdistan, as he visits various tea-houses, villages, and checkpoints. This biopolitical network indicates a Kurdish identity within Iran that is molecular in nature, as recourse to Kurdish nationalism in the past has led to severe reprisal from the Iranian and surrounding states. The movement of Mamo and his sons amongst the Kurdish countryside resists the regulatory biopower implicated in Iranian law and censorship, a reading promoted by ruptures in the linear and causal narrative of the film. These ruptures take the form of 'sound situations', where the aural register of the film becomes intensified and the narrative slips from present to future, suggesting Mamo's imminent death. Embodied within Mamo, these sound situations explain the impossibility of a Kurdish revolution, the inability to realize independence, but also the vitality and

persistence of Kurdish peoples more broadly.

The film begins with bus driver and trip enabler Kako quoting Kierkegaard at a cock fight, “I am not afraid of death because when I am here he is not... And when he is here I am not. No gain or loss is more important than death” to which his audience replies: “No gain or loss is more important than death”. This quote anticipates the poetic trajectory of the film as a narrative about Mamo's travel towards his own death, a narrative reinforced in the scene where Mamo is first introduced – the first shot of Mamo shows him lying still in an open grave staring upwards blankly – and a scene near the end of the film – Mamo climbs into a coffin resting mysteriously against a featureless, snow-covered hill along the Iran-Iraq border, where one of his sons and the mystical Niwemang find that he has passed away. The film constantly suggests throughout the narrative that Mamo understands he is dying, but that it is an important event he must move towards rather than flee. His determination is significant, as he is the only clear bearer of Kurdish national identity within the film, but as a result, so is the status of his death in the film. Mamo represents an overt Kurdish nationalism, which must die, because it no longer allows Kurdish culture and identity to flourish – it is through, for example, Kurdish music that Kurdish culture and identity is allowed to live again. And in the final scene of the film, as we hear Mamo's sons begin to play at the concert they have been traveling towards all along, the supposed corpse of Mamo is shown against the dark background of a coffin opening its eyes, moved by the music. One reading would be that it is through music that Kurdish culture can thrive, but *Half-Moon* also shows a different, more subtle logic at work, which articulates a non-

oppositional and minor position that the Kurds might inhabit in relation to the majoritarian discourses that exclude Kurdish identities.

I have used the term 'network' above, because *Half-Moon*, despite its rural setting, treats the Kurdish people as a biopolitical information system where Kurds in villages remote from one another share news, friendships, and knowledge of particularly Kurdish phenomena like Mamo's musical celebrity. Although Castells focuses on technological networks, the internet and wireless technologies, through the actual movement of bodies in Ghobadi's films the Kurds establish similar forms of communication. It is also worth noting, however, that both internet and television satellite technology plays a role in Ghobadi's films, suggesting a natural uptake of technologies endemic to the population. I use the term biopolitical, however, because Kurds present an *embodied politics* – regardless of individual political leanings, the various nation-states to which Kurdistan belongs all treat the Kurds as a significant political force, even when through disavowal such as the neglect of public infrastructure in Kurdish regions (Natali 2005, 39; Chaliand 1993, 244). As a result of their biopolitical status – being charged as political for who they are and how they live, or their existential difference – as far as the Iranian state is concerned, there can be no separation of public and private spheres, as the private sphere breeds the grounds for a secessionist movement that must eventually be dealt with by the state. As Fardin Alikhah points out, even satellite television stations that promote Kurdish ethnic identity "might be exploited as [producing] ethnic divisions by political forces" (Alikhah 2008, 106). Even more significantly, a particular fear of the Iranian state is that human rights defenders such as the United Nations will take

more interest in the Kurds, requiring fair economic treatment of Kurdish populations and areas, and as a result “rights activists already under extreme pressure from the state seek to distance themselves from the Kurds, an issue that they know will inflame the authorities” (Yildiz and Taysi 2007, 33). The fact that the Kurds themselves are able to thrive culturally, under such pressure, requires inquiry into *how* they are able to do so. *Half-Moon* addresses this question through the movement and musical celebrity of Mamo.

In *Half-Moon*, Mamo's musical celebrity drives the narrative as he organizes his sons' travel to Iraqi-Kurdistan in order to hold a 'freedom concert' after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Evidence of this celebrity is reified by interactions with various Kurds throughout Kurdistan, as mentioned previously in relation to the biopolitical networks established by the travel of these characters. The first instance that establishes his celebrity is the driver Kako's insistence on borrowing a bus in the beginning of the film, bargaining for it by telling the owner that he'll be famous when the world knows it was his bus that transported Mamo from Iran to Iraq – as Kako says, “all the networks will be there, BBC, CNN!”. From the beginning, Mamo's celebrity crosses borders – from Iran to Iraq, and perhaps Syria and Turkey are implicated here as well, as well as the United Kingdom and the United States. Despite the Iranian state's attempt to quell Kurdish nationalism, this scene, or at least Kako, suggests that there is a global audience for displays of Kurdish music and culture. At the same time, however, Kako is presented as an idealistic and rather reckless character. For example, he learns towards the end of the film that the video recorder that he's been using during the trip to create a

documentary about their travels has no tape. As a result, it is questionable to what extent Kako's ideas about the popularity of the concert are true or not. The tapeless recorder also serves a symbolic function, however, suggesting that the trip is in some way unable to be communicated, despite the fact that the audience is viewing a film about the very trip Kako cannot film. This is a point I will return to later, however, as the end of the film has its own unique formal way of positing the (in)ability to present a strong Kurdish cultural presence or nationalism.

Despite the seeming inability to communicate this cultural moment through technology, there are three distinct scenes in the film where various groups of Kurds recognize Mamo as a Kurdish musical celebrity and thus indicate the spread of Kurdish culture through the different form of a (bio)network. I will quickly detail these scenes, because they reveal the subjective and locational diversity of the Kurds that recognize Mamo's celebrity. Mamo's first scene of recognition is at the outdoor schoolhouse his daughter has constructed for refugee children. Towards the end of this scene, a group of children run up to Mamo for autographs. Though this scene seems incidental, it is also probably one of the most significant scenes that announces Mamo's celebrity – despite the fact that Mamo is an older, dying musician, the scene shows he is popular with Kurdistan's youth, the demographic that will embody the next wave of Kurdish culture. Additionally, his music is traditional Kurdish music, rather than foreign inspired music that youth – as shown in Ghobadi's latest feature, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* – might otherwise prefer. The second scene in which Mamo is recognized for his celebrity is when the Mamo and his group arrive at the Iran-Iraq border after they are stopped by

border guards. One of these guards turns out to be Kurdish, and proclaims his own Kurdishness: “Mamo... it is okay, I am Kurdish too... leave everything to me”. In proclaiming his Kurdishness, the border guard exposes his minor position as a Kurdish agent of the Iranian state. The Iranian captain, after stopping their group the second time, refuses them passage across the Iran-Iraq border and takes Hesho, the female musician they had been illegally traveling with. Not only does the Kurdish border guard subvert his status as a border guard by finding a way for their group to secretly cross the border, he also manages to return Hesho to Mamo's group. The Kurdish border guard acts as a surreptitious counter-agent to the Iranian state, reversing its official decision, as per the captain's orders, to refuse passage to the freedom concert and detain the female singer. Whereas music may seem harmless, this scene reveals its political status in relation to policies of the Iranian state. Finally, Mamo is recognized by the patrons of a tea-house in rural Iraqi-Kurdistan directly after Hesho leaves the group. This demographic often serves as the stereotype of the rural Kurd, but also serves as an example of the Kurdish population that lives without infrastructural support from the state – a legacy inherited from pre-revolutionary times (Yildiz and Taysi 2007, 35-36). Although seemingly apolitical compared to the previous two examples, the Kurds in this scene most clearly exemplify what I've referred to above as a biopolitical network. As Mamo and his sons enter, the owner of the establishment immediately greets him and calls for “a round of applause for Mamo”. Though these Kurds only have an old tape recorder to play Mamo's tapes on as far as we know, they are well aware of his celebrity. Though presumably lacking access to satellite television stations, through word of mouth and travel, Mamo's celebrity has reached even Kurds on the periphery living in

mountainous regions on the Iran-Iraq border.[3] The vastness of Mamo's celebrity is indicative of the biopolitical status of Kurds as a networked community.

Mamo's musical presence operates differently from Western musical celebrity; whereas I would argue the Western celebrity transcends its place in reality, Mamo in *Half-Moon* is immanently involved with the tea-houses and amongst his fans. In fact, Mamo's celebrity is embodied within the experience of the Kurds themselves. While perhaps not much of a philosophical commentary on Western musical celebrity, there is a clear difference between the internalization of Mamo's status in Kurdish culture, and the exteriorization of celebrity in Western cultures through media machines. I am not saying that these same media machines do not exist in Kurdish culture, because there are in fact several Kurdish satellite stations (see previous footnote; these are relatively recent developments). While there are Kurdish media outlets, albeit on a much smaller scale, I am speaking strictly of Mamo's presentation in *Half-Moon*. In fact, the only media that communicate Mamo's music in the film are the grainy cassette player in the tea house, and the sheets of music that are taken from Mamo's jacket in the end of the film. Both media are suggestive of something passed amongst friends, rather than facets of media outlets such as satellite TV stations. As mentioned previously, Kako's camera, having never had any film to begin with, also suggests an inability to take such representation outside of Kurdistan, despite the paradox that Ghobadi's film has found global success. The fact that this interiorization of Mamo's celebrity occurs across a range of

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[3] Because of *Half-Moon*'s release in 2006, it is unlikely that the Kurdish satellite stations that began broadcasting in 2006 were around when Ghobadi began filming. For more information, see: Alikhah, Fardin. "The Politics of Satellite TV in Iran." Ed. Mehdi Semati. *Media, Culture and Society in Iran: Living with Globalization and the Islamic State*. London: Routledge, 2008. 100-101.

demographics is a poignant political point, because it indicates the collapse of the public and private sphere on a wide scale in the Kurdish community. In other words, the characters' consumption of Mamo's celebrity in *Half-Moon* marks them as resolutely Kurdish, and thus in a contentious position with the Identity-building assemblage of the Iranian state. And despite Ghobadi's claims of being an apolitical filmmaker, the Iranian state is hyper-aware of displays of Kurdish identity as argued previously by Alikhah, Yildiz, and Taysi. By displaying this interiorization of Kurdish culture through Mamo's celebrity, Ghobadi seems acutely aware of this situation for Iranian-Kurds – a concept he addresses directly when Mamo and his sons are refused entry into Iraq in order to hold a concert, which the captain pejoratively refers to as a 'party'. The idea that the Kurds in the film are interiorizing Mamo's celebrity in particular must be reconciled with the overall trajectory of the film and its final conclusion: that Mamo is heading towards his death, and finally passes away on a featureless snowy hillside in Kurdistan. While one might take this to be the death of an oppositional Kurdish cultural identity, this interiorization and collapse of public and private spheres suggests a new politics under a different heading. Namely, a modern politics embodied in a Kurdish, molecular identity shown most accurately in Mamo's sons, who are the bearers of the Kurdish music but reticent about marching into Iraq to hold a freedom rally. The sons as a group, often disagreeing but still brothers, present a fragmented version of Mamo's nationalism. This is further compounded by the fact that the spectator never bears witness to the concert in Iraq, which I will return to in discussing how *Half-Moon* operates meta-cinematically. Before addressing the ending of the film, I will turn to the 'sound situations' that punctuate the narrative of *Half-Moon* and reveal its play with

time.

The meta-cinematic narrative in the film is constructed through what Deleuze would call 'sound situations'. These situations are notable for their disconnection from the sensory-motor connections that link the rest of the film and, as a result, introduce a non-linear form of time in the film. Contrasting neo-realism and traditional realism, Deleuze argues a “sound situation becomes established in what we might call 'any-space-whatever', whether disconnected, or emptied” (Deleuze 1989, 5). Like Amy Herzog's concept of the 'musical moment', these scenes in the film deterritorialize the superficial narrative – that Mamo and his sons are traveling to Iraq to hold a freedom concert – poetically expanding the diverse ways the film 'makes meaning'. Herzog defines musical moments “not as texts to be 'decoded' but as dynamic events, distinct temporal occurrences that are always open to the outside” (Herzog 2009, 16). And while Herzog acknowledges that musical moments rely on repetition, she also suggests that these 'dreams of difference' or recourse to the outside are inherent in the event or musical moment. Following Hume and Deleuze on repetition and habit, Herzog makes a clear distinction between the repetition of cliché and “the most basic operations of perception and cognition”: “Habit here is not the mere repetition of a code but the introduction of difference, of something new, within the mind that is impacted by the perception and anticipation of a pattern” (17). As Henri Bergson elegantly put it,

> I cannot escape the objection that there is no state of mind, however simple, which does not change every moment, since there is no consciousness without memory, and no continuation of a state without the addition, to the present feeling, of the memory of past moments. (Bergson 1998, 44)

The sound situation in *Half-Moon* is in no danger of becoming cliché, because it does

not rely on particular cultural tropes or artifacts, but it is repeated throughout the film with subtle difference each time. As a result, the play between repetition and difference is a key concern in understanding its purpose in the film. At face value, the repetition of these sounds situations paint a psychological portrait for the viewer. On the other hand, they push the narrative towards its poetic and mystical conclusion, opening the film to 'the outside' allowing a meta-cinematic understanding of the film.

The first sound situation accompanies Mamo's introduction, immediately after we see him lying in an open grave. From the start, the sound situations are directly connected to the anticipation of Mamo's death in the film by presenting a form of future-time. In revealing what appear to be Mamo's hallucinatory thoughts, however, these sound situations expand on this general progression throughout the film. I refer to these moments as 'sound situations', because each time one occurs, Mamo enters a state of acute sound-perception – rather than, for example, a musical number as we might find in Herzog's 'musical moment'. For the duration of these sound situations, it is as if Mamo, and the viewer with him, hears minute sounds amplified to such a degree that one experiences the aural texture of the materials around Mamo: the crunch of dirt or snow under a boot, the roll of a die, the clinking of beads, or the hallow thumps of an empty coffin. This last item accompanies each sound situation in the form of a vision, appearing unexpectedly while Mamo is in the throes of acute sound-perception. In these scenes, the camera cuts between close-ups on Mamo's distracted face, his surroundings marked by the hallow detachment of environmental sounds, and a coffin being dragged by a woman towards the edge of a mostly static frame. Both the hollow detachment

from the sounds of Mamo's immediate environment, and the seeming introduction of another time-space in the image of the woman dragging the coffin, create the trance-like feeling of these scenes. While these scenes do not operate as they might in a musical or music video, they do share this moment of being 'open to the outside' through their rejection of immediate narrative causality. Mamo's experiences these acute sound-situations four times throughout the film: when Mamo is introduced; while visiting a 'wise man' after one of his sons urges him to delay the trip; at the tea house after Hesho leaves the group; and finally at the time of Mamo's 'death', when he finds the coffin of his dreams before him. Each scene shares the vision of a coffin being dragged, and sounds associated with this dragging – the hollow thump of the coffin, the clinking of the beads worn by the person dragging the coffin – forming a framing narrative that exists outside of the accompanying narrative. Providing a hint to the nature of this framing narrative, when the woman that is gradually revealed through Mamo's visions shows up in 'reality', he gives no indication of recognizing her from his visions. As a result, these dreams seem to be non-diegetic, at least to Mamo's film-world. Each vision, in breaking with narrative causality, points towards an 'outside' – here in the case of the characters' experience – but they also point to another outside, a meta-cinematic reading of the film that comments specifically on the place of Kurdish identity within the film.

These sound situations reveal that *Half-Moon* is not just about Mamo's death, or even the death of Kurdish nationalism (as Mamo might be identified as the bearer of a nationalist impulse), but rather that the difficulty of representing Kurdish nationalism or

culture on film in Iran is intolerable. The poetic, non-causal sound situations in *Half-Moon* also reveal the outside to be the real world conditions and difficulties in the production of cultural artifacts, particularly the production of films. This meta-cinematic narrative shadows both the superficial and poetic narrative of the film in following Mamo's gradual progress towards both the concert in Iraqi-Kurdistan and Mamo's own death, realized through his visions, deteriorating health, and moments where he directly acknowledges this inevitably. Near the end of the film, Mamo becomes overwhelmed by the intolerable nature of his trip, and lays down in a grave and asks his sons to throw dirt on him. The various setbacks in the film, difficulty crossing borders, the confiscation of musical instruments, and the detaining of the musical group's female singer, culminate to illustrate what is intolerable to Mamo in his current environment. Namely, the restrictions posed by the state that prevent any proclamation of Kurdish identity or expression. Just as Boualem sees leaving Bab el-Oued as the only way out of an intolerable situation, Mamo sees death as his only escape. Turning to a potential reading in light of Mamo's role as the only clear bearer of Kurdish nationalism, the message of the film seems clear: Kurdish nationalism is dying out. I believe that this is a misreading, however, and that Ghobadi argues not that Kurdish nationalism is dying, but that it must take another path in the current ideological climate. In 2004, the time of *Half-Moon*'s release, President Mohammad Khatami was in power and known for granting more freedom to artists within Iran (see Holtmeier 2012; Zeydabadi-Nejad 2010). Regardless, *Half-Moon* was refused an exhibition permit. Ghobadi, known for making films about Kurds was warned by state officials not to make another Kurdish language film, because it might be encourage 'separatism' (see Alikhah 2008 for more

on this anxiety). Because Iranian censors check films at three points – the script, during filming, and the finished product – it was possible for Ghobadi to make his film, but for the final product to be refused exhibition within Iran. As a result, *Half-Moon* marks a point where Ghobadi turns away from the official Iranian film industry. Later, I will show how Ghobadi's attitude changed post-Khatami, but at the time *Half-Moon* was being filmed, arguing for a minor mode of Kurdish artistic production was a feasible alternative to overt Kurdish nationalism.

This argument is most clearly evidenced in *Half-Moon*'s conclusion, when Niwemang and one of Mamo's sons finds his lifeless body. Mamo has crawled into the mysterious coffin of his dreams and his corporeal body has passed away, finally granting him reprieve from the restrictions he found intolerable. Niwemang and Mamo's son find another life within the coffin, however, as they reach inside Mamo's jacket and discover manuscripts of the Kurdish songs he has been working on for the past 7 years. Throughout the film, Mamo reiterates this time-line and although it is difficult to determine the exact time that *Half-Moon* takes place, it is likely that placing it 7 years earlier correlates with use of chemical weapons on the town of Halabja in Iraq, 1988. Since the attacks on Halabja, Mamo has been anticipating the 'liberation' of Kurdish peoples by writing music. And while the freedom concert is an outright display of Kurdish liberation, Mamo's strategy was not to arrive at the concert in Iraq to present himself as the bearer of Kurdish nationalism, but to start laying the rhizomatic groundwork in his sons, Hesho, and music he has recorded and disseminated. He clearly knew he was traveling towards his own death, but the movement of the characters

throughout the film, and various responses to Mamo's musical celebrity, are evidence of the rhizomatic infrastructure Mamo was establishing, and from which Kurdish identity emerges – not in opposition to surrounding nation states, but as a way of resisting attacks on Kurdish culture and identity that benefits these nation states by keeping the Kurdish populations docile. To emphasize this point, the film ends with Mamo's corpse against a black background, accompanied by the sounds of a crowded concert suggesting the remaining sons were able to hold the musical event. As viewers, we see no images of the concert, however, because the concert itself was not the goal the film previously makes it out to be, but rather the music being shared amongst Kurdish peoples. The concert as representation of Kurdish identity cannot be shown – it must be substituted with a blank screen – because, as Yildiz and Taysi argue, the Kurds have become more politically sophisticated from centuries of oppression by surrounding powers. Ghobadi ends on a positive note for Kurdish peoples, however: even though a classical Kurdish nationalism must die, the last image in *Half-Moon* shows Mamo's corpse opening his eyes. Mamo's efforts were not in vain, for they have sown the seeds for an emergent people to come – the production of subjectivity prompted by the intolerable come to fruition – though in this new 'resistance' subjectivity takes fragmentary form as a modern political film.

No One Knows About Persian Cats or the Musical Genres of Tehran

Ghobadi's latest film, *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, is drastically different from his previous films, evidencing his break from the Iranian film industry. Unlike his other features, this latest film was made completely under the radar: without funding or a permit from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, using forged papers for

necessary equipment and personnel, and released streaming on the internet for the youth of Tehran. And while Ghobadi has been labeled a 'rural filmmaker' for setting his previous films in remote regions of Iran, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* explores the heart of Tehran and its urban, often gritty, environments. Like *Half-Moon,* however, the film also contains narrative ruptures in the form of 'sound situations'. These sound situations take the form of various music videos spread throughout the film, which interrupt the narrative and cause it to stutter. While I use the term 'music video' here, I do so because each sequence lasts the length of a single song, not because they follow a particular popular music video aesthetic. Instead, the music videos of *No One Knows About Persian Cats* often blend in with the surrounding narrative, while including cuts that break away from the otherwise causal connections in the film, almost to the point of montage. And while the music in each of these sequences varies, the scenes themselves are distinctly Iranian, often depicting Iranian peoples and land/cityscapes. In doing so, the film suggests that while the musical genres it depicts are banned by the Iranian state, they exist in an immanent relationship with actual Iranian subjects. Like in *Half-Moon*, these ruptures in cinematic time then also represent ruptures in the majoritarian discourse, which cannot account for or contain the actual populations of Iran.

No One Knows About Persian Cats follows two young musicians, Negar and Ashkan, as they try to form a band in order to enter a music contest in London, which would allow them to leave Iran and pursue their dreams of becoming indie-rock musicians. This premise allows Ghobadi to set up a narrative structure similar to that of his two previous films, *Marooned in Iraq* and *Half-Moon*, this time with the protagonists traveling

throughout Tehran looking for musicians rather than Kurdistan. This narrative structure is also similar to that of a 'road movie' with scenes of the pair traveling and seeing various sites in Tehran, as if the film itself is mapping out the diversity of the city. Each time they visit a band to ask them if they would be willing to play a part in their project, we see the band play a song as the film becomes a form of 'music video', playing the music over scenes from the film, but also images unrelated to the events of the narrative. Just as the images map the diversity of Tehran, these songs map the diversity in Tehran's music scene and the subjects that inhabit it, as the musicians play everything from traditional Persian music to hip-hop. The diversity in locations, musical genres, and, more subtly, social classes, indicates the film's politics: rather than the hegemonic Islamic entity that Iran's laws and regulations make it out to be, Tehran is a place of possibility, where despite the official facade, one has the ability to define their own direction. Significantly for Ghobadi's public debate with Kiarostami, this includes the choice to leave Iran, *but also* the choice to stay and choose one's identity *within Iran*.

While *No One Knows About Persian Cats* is not a musical – it is perhaps difficult to define what genre the film belongs to – Richard Dyer's work on the musical reveals a great deal about the film in showing an important distinction between the more traditional genre of the musical and Ghobadi's film. For Dyer, musicals have a particular social function, to present “Alternatives, hopes, wishes... the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized” (Dyer 2002, 20). If not presenting 'utopia' outright, musical numbers are the vehicle that deliver the realization or possibility of 'alternatives, hopes, wishes' through the “extra

ordinary mix of... the historicity of narrative and the lyricism of [musical] numbers" (35). *No One Knows About Persian Cats* operates according to a mix that oscillates between 'historicity', or the everyday problems the musicians in Tehran must deal with, and the 'lyricism' that introduces a new visual and rhythmic structure to the film. Unlike Dyer's lyricism, however, there is little indication of 'utopia' in the musical sequences of *No One Knows About Persian Cats*. Instead, these sequences present more 'historicity' through seemingly indexical images that portray gritty streets, the homeless and poor, and Islamic law being carried out in Tehran. In fact, the images presented in the musical sequences, compounded by lyrics that describe the inequities of Tehran, are further removed from utopia than the non-musical narrative of the film; or, in other words, the musical sequences present an even more realist account of life in Tehran, even if politically selective in terms of what events are shown. In doing so, these images exist in an immanent relationship with the actual subjects of Tehran, rather than operating as a codified narrative or the even more transcendent morality tales the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance privilege through funding schemes.

For Dyer, citing Fredric Jameson and Ernst Bloch, there is a more basic force at work within this utopian drive though. Describing the 'formal nature of Utopian fulfillment' in Bloch, Jameson illustrates "the movement of the world in time towards the future's ultimate moment, and the more spatial notion of that adequation of object to subject which must characterise that moment's content... [These] correspond to dramatic and lyrical modes of the presentation of not-yet-being" (35). In other words, the utopian operation in narratives more basically present the future, what is-not but could-be, rather

than the more common notion of utopia as a 'perfect world', as traditionally associated with Thomas Moore. In this respect, the basic narrative function described by Jameson and Bloch produces a people to come through the presentation of 'not-yet-being'. This also elucidates the function of 'hope' within the Frankfurt school, which allows art the power to impact real people and motivate change, not by presenting a new, better world, but by mobilizing the desire to change what *is*. In this respect, this focus on futurity and not necessarily utopia reflects an immanent, Deleuzian politics concerning belief in the world as opposed to belief in transcendental ideals or morals. Whereas Deleuze is critical of utopian notions as a transcendental 'blueprint' for society, I argue that *No One Knows About Persian Cats* presents a 'not-yet-being' open to change and innovation by focusing on the collective desire of musicians in the film, and the desire to express a core-component of their subjectivity in the form of differing musical genres. Despite its tragic conclusion, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* examples this narrative drive towards the presentation of 'not-yet-being' through the previously mentioned affective 'sound situations' that take the form of music videos. The ability of these sound situations to present this 'not-yet-being' comes from the affective nature of these sequences.

Though I have marked out differences between Dyer's discussion of utopia in the musical and the less idealistic presentation of the future in *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, Dyer's discussion of affect still applies to the current case study. Citing Susanne K. Langer, Dyer makes the argument that “We are moved by music, yet it has the least obvious reference to 'reality' – the intensity of our response to it can only be

accounted for by the way music, abstract, formal though it is, still embodies feeling" (21). Langer draws a correlation between the intensity of music and the intensity of human emotion. Sounding rather Deleuzian in her discussion of intensities, she argues:

> The tonal structures we call 'music' bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling – forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm of subtle activation or dreamy lapses – not joy and sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of both – the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. (21)

The fact that music is affective, or that people 'feel' music, is not necessarily a groundbreaking idea, but Langer suggests that these musical structures correlate with emotional structures in such a way that the sounds, rhythms, and melodies structure our feelings of the accompanying images. In the case of *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, the film presents a violent contradiction between the musical-affect and the images of its song sequences.

Many of the music sequences in *No One Knows About Persian Cats* juxtapose images of – and lyrics about – an impoverished and repressive environment with music full of 'upbeat vitality'. Though textual description cannot do justice to the affective nature of the music, each song includes rhythms and melodies that clash with the visually represented elements. While the images and lyrics illustrate contemporary problems in Tehran and Iranian society more generally, it is the *feeling* of the music that suggests change is possible. By mobilizing feeling through affect *towards* the situations depicted by the images, I argue that the music introduces the 'not-yet-being' in these sequences by eliminating complacency and introducing 'hope' on an embodied register for the viewer. As a result, the musical sequences in *No One Knows About Persian Cats*

exercise a productive power – rather than presenting a new, utopian reality, the juxtaposition of '*vitally felt'* music and images of class-based struggle (class in the more wholistic sense of Hardt and Negri) motivate thought and action towards these issues.

The most poignant sequence that demonstrates this juxtaposition between the vitality of the music and the visual and lyrical depictions occurs when Nader visits the famous hip-hop artist Hichkas to enlist him for Negar and Ashkan's band. As briefly mentioned earlier, this sequence parallels the real life debate between Ghobadi and Kiarostami regarding a desire to leave Iran due to political difficulties. At this point in the film, Negar and Ashkan are trying to move to London, to leave Iran for the foreseeable future. While critical of the ruling regime, Hichkas delivers a monologue on top of a building under construction that clearly defines his desire to remain within Iran:

> We came up here to shoot a video. To check out the streets from above. To show 'em that this is Tehran! Know what I'm saying? We came up here so we can scream, wake up the city, all these buildings. If we sing underground, the sound won't go past the floor. We used to sleep on the streets. We grew up here. Everything is here! Our work... Our lives, our romances, our friendships... I swear, there's no other place to be, bro. What we do... what's it called? Persian rap. Right? That means it's for right here.

Despite Kiarostami's charge that Ghobadi doesn't care about Iran, his inclusion of Hichkas's strong sentiment here suggests otherwise. Furthermore, this sentiment connected with the following musical sequence suggests a strong desire to transform the current state of affairs in Iran, defining a 'belief in Iran' to forward a Deleuzian position. The musical sequence begins with aerial shots of buildings in Tehran, reflecting Hichkas's desire to 'wake up the city... all these buildings'. It then begins cutting between various citizens of Tehran going about their daily life and labors: a man carries

trash to the dump, another works a jackhammer on a street construction project, many are shown looking into the camera, as if in a testimonial. The music speaks for these characters, and the lyrics define the inequity of different socio-economic classes in Tehran. Halfway through the song, the lyrics relay: “A hobo stands next to a Benz. He isn't worth enough to rent it. Me, you him came from a single drop. Look at the gap between us. It's not gravity that makes the world spin. Money makes the world go round. Today, it's money first, God second for everyone, peasant or boss”. Pointing out hypocrisies in the religious leadership, Hichkas mobilizes listeners or viewers towards political issues by pointing out these inequities, but also through affective hip hop beat and emotion of the lyrics. The music makes you want to dance and move, and perhaps, Hichkas would want, mobilizes the subjects in Tehran to act on the inequality they live amidst.

Another sequence notable for its radical alterity to Persian musical traditions depicts the practice session of a heavy metal band. This musical session is notable for several other reasons as well, including its depiction of women and the contraction of hepatitis by band members due to the conditions they practice their music in. Like the monologue Hichkas gives, comments from one of the band members about their music precedes the actual sequence. The member of this band relates: “We used to play heavy metal but we changed, we softened up the lyrics. It used to be much heavier, but now we sing in Persian. It's closer to Iranian culture. People can relate to it more easily”. This sentiment is carried out visually in the musical sequence that follows in its depiction of various people around Tehran, similar to the Hichkas sequence albeit with less emphasis on

labor. This song, titled “No Fences”, shows another non-musical subject-group in its focus on people riding motorcycles and dirt bikes. Scenes of people doing 'wheelies' on motorcycles and going off large dirt jumps on dirt bikes accompany lyrics like “Open your eyes – I'm tired. There's no room in your cage for me”. The target of this statement seems to be the Iranian government, as the video shows candid footage of the Iranian military out of a car window, along the with the lyrics “My words were not criminal, though they were hanged”. In the most striking shot in the sequence, a dirt biker removes their helmet to reveal that the rider is a woman, while the lyrics scream “The fences around your mind cannot contain me”. A rare event, and one that depicts the unofficial status of this film, the woman looks at the camera and laughs without veil or headscarf, a direct violation of Sharia law. Just as the musicians play their heavy metal, the sequence depicts other individuals, or communities sharing a common interest, resistant to the restrictions of the current regime. This sequence takes a tragic turn, however, as halfway through the song the drummer falls off his seat and must be taken to the hospital. After explaining what happened, the doctor informs them that the drummer has hepatitis and that they all must be tested. The doctor ends his lecture by saying: “You're crazy, rehearsing in a cowshed!” Due to the type of music they play, however, the cowshed is the only place the band could find to practice. Like female biker without a veil, these subjects are relegated to the periphery, which can be a dangerous place to inhabit.

The opposition between mainstream subjects and those that inhabit the periphery is a basic concern of *No One Knows About Persian Cats,* and reflects its status as a modern

political film in its critique of majoritarian discourses. Ghobadi conceived this film after a period of depression induced by his inability to make films. After being told by officials not to film *Half-Moon* predominately in the Kurdish language, and doing it anyway, officials restricted Ghobadi's ability to make films, which resulted in his depression – Bahman Farmanara, another Iranian filmmaker with transnational ties has echoed this feeling of depression after being refused production and exhibition permits (Holtmeier 2012). In an interview with *Filmmaker Magazine*, Ghobadi has said of *No One Knows About Persian Cats*:

> Censorship, repression, and pressure: these are the things that brought me to [this] film. I had been trying to make another film for three years, but the government gave me a very hard time and would not release permission for it. I was kept at home and I couldn't do anything; it was a struggle day after day. Often I thought about committing suicide. (Macaulay 2010)

A friend convinced him to engage his other passions rather than committing suicide or leaving Tehran, so Ghobadi entered the underground music scene in Tehran. While producing his own music under the radar, Ghobadi met the musicians that appear in *No One Knows About Persian Cats* and decided to make a film not only about them, but with them. By allowing characters to play themselves, Ghobadi creates intercessors by, as Deleuze would say, "taking real and not fictional characters, but putting these very characters in the condition of 'making up fiction', of 'making legends', of 'story-telling'" (Deleuze 1989, 222). As a result, *No One Knows About Persian Cats* is "an act of story-telling which [is] not... a return to myth but a production of collective utterances capable of raising misery to a strange positivity, the *invention of a people*" (222; my emphasis). In other words, not a return to the myth of Tehran established by Islamic officials and repressive laws or even the institution of a counter-myth, but a collection of voices that

point towards the future of a newly self-invented people.

This collection of voices is present in Tehran as a group of musicians consciously working to increase their agency and improve conditions of life in the officially-enforced religious environment that their homeland has become. *No One Knows About Persian Cats* details the struggles of these individuals, but allows them to formulate their own positions about their work and their homeland. After refusing to leave Iran with Negar and Ashkan, renowned Iranian rapper Hichkas explains: “Trust me, for me there's nothing like outside here 'cause what I speak for is the heart of this place”. And while the musicians in the film may want to speak for their own version of Tehran, their method of doing so is not to present some unattainable utopia through their art, but to spread an *intensity* vitally felt through their music that mobilizes the desire to work towards a better, more cooperative future. *No One Knows About Persian Cats* illustrates this aesthetic strategy by coupling images of the present to be changed with the music that penetrates the repression in order to reveal change as a real possibility – a possibility that can be talked about, but more importantly, a possibility that can be felt. The affective register of the music describes the situation of Kafka Deleuze relates in *Cinema 2*: “the impossibility of not 'writing', the impossibility of writing in the dominant language, the impossibility of writing differently” (217). These musicians, and Ghobadi himself, cannot face the prospect of not making music, being forced to make the music of the dominant discourse, and even of being forced to make their music differently. This impossibility results in the fragmentation of a so-called 'national' subject into the many subjects with their respective musical tastes and desires for the

future that describes Tehran in reality.

While *No One Knows About Persian Cats* follows what I argue to be a productive political program throughout the majority of its running time, Ghobadi, like Allouache in the previous chapter, finishes on a pessimistic note, which reads as a clear argument regarding the political environment of Iran at the time of the film. Ghobadi's hope that the people of Iran will continue to invent themselves anew and express their unique interests despite political and existential regulations is tempered by Ashkan's possible death at the end of the film. His injury occurs after police arrive at a party Ashkan is attending during the final moments of the film. Panicked by their presence, Ashkan attempts to flee from a nearby window and falls to the ground. Striking for such a musical film, the loud screams, yells, and music of the party cuts to silence at the moment Ashkan begins to flee. During this sequence, the only sound is the hollow thump as his body hits the pavement. During a long shot on Ashkan's motionless body from above, acoustic guitar begins to play, accompanied by Negar's mournful voice soon after. After the long shot, the music continues to play and a montage cuts between the concert that was to be Ashkan and Negar's parting show, Negar listening to music on a rooftop with a pained expression on her face, shots of Negar and Ashkan together that appear to be memories, fire works, a woman dancing with flames, and Ashkan playing at (presumably) a different concert in the past. During this montage, Negar falls backwards at one point, suggesting that she has thrown herself off the rooftop, but the film does not confirm this act. Instead, the film ends on an overhead shot of Ashkan's bloody face as he is wheeled into a hospital. The film does not end with definite

narrative conclusion, but several things are clear: the police officer's arrival, who comes to discipline the errant subjects at the party, prompts Ashkan to jump out of the window, and this act that leads to a sensory-motor disruption in the form of a montage. This sequence disrupts the conclusion of the film, that Negar and Ashkan will successfully reach their goal in traveling to London, and the formal causal connections, as montage confuses the time and space between the events and images depicted. If, in *Half-Moon,* Mamo faces something intolerable in the restriction of Kurdish expression, which eventually ends in his death, here the regulatory function of the police presents a similar encounter with this intolerable form of biopower. Like *Half-Moon* also, however, the film does not end with death alone. While the indie rock duo will probably not make it to London for their concert, Ashkan's broken and bloodied face entering the hospital suggests the potential for his survival. In fact, Negar and Ashkan, a real musical duo outside of the film, did make it to London, so that while the film presents the current regulatory measures inside Iran as intolerable, the reality of these musicians' situation is that they will continue to make music, even if they must leave Iran to do so. Considering the ending of *Bab El-Oued City*, however, Negar and Ashkan's departure may be just as evident of the intolerable nature in contemporary Iran for musicians. By not revealing this non-diegetic reality, that Negar and Ashkan make it to London, Ghobadi presents a political message for the population of Tehran, advocating change rather than departure.

Different Sonic Strategies for Fragmenting Subjects

Ghobadi's films that I have discussed here operate on various levels in order to construct the grounds for a 'people to come'. Rather than define the identity of the Kurds or the

musical youths in Tehran, they allow the construction of an assemblage that links the films to notions of identity and possibility – the possibility for characters, and viewers by proxy, to take part in the construction of their own subjectivities. *Half-Moon* argues through non-causal sound-situations that outright displays of Kurdish nationalism, such as the freedom concert, cannot be represented in films – an argument we can extend through Yildiz and Taysi to the media and political conversations about nations as well. *No One Knows About Persian Cats* works on an affective level to mobilize desires to change the present images of Tehran, suggesting a new, politically and culturally motivated people dedicated to the future of Tehran. Each of these films focus on minor subjectivities in Iran, insofar as the subjects promoted by state laws and regulations can be posited as majoritarian subjectivities, in that they respond to the Islamic ideology that permeates Iranian culture, filmmaking, and politics. While Ghobadi may not be overtly political, his films are politically productive, as they lay the groundwork for social change and the emergence of a new social-ecology in Iran.

While each film I have addressed here operates according to a sonic strategy that reveals a different operation of time – *Half-Moon* by injecting a future-time into the present of the narrative and *No One Knows About Persian Cats* by introducing musical sequences that punctuate its narrative – they both include 'sound situations' that interrupt or fragment the narrative. These moments interrupt the majoritarian time of the films, or causal and linear film-time, and create, as Herzog puts it, “distinct temporal occurrences that are always open to the outside” (Herzog 2009, 16). The introduction of an exterior, I argue in turn, creates a difference that allows for the emergence of new subjects in

these films – or subjects that the majoritarian discourse imposed by cinematic censorship cannot represent. In *Half-Moon*, the sound situations break with a nationalist discourse, and prompts a minoritarian becoming in the form of a Kurdish desire that networks Kurds through music. *No One Knows About Persian Cats* makes recourse to sound situations that resemble 'music videos', but focus on realist examples rather than fantasy. The lyrics and affective emotion of these songs prompts a turn towards changing the present reality in Tehran, a transformation made possible by the break with causal narrative. The next chapter, while not focusing on music and sound situations to the same degree, similarly explores the realist and quotidian space created through a break with state-based filmmaking and censorship in China. Through these breaks with a linear, teleological narrative, which risks a return to majoritarian conclusion, Ghobadi's films create a space from which a new people might be conceived inside Iran.

After examining Ghobadi's later films more closely, Kiarostami's criticism of Ghobadi is a little ironic. Despite Kiarostami's accusations, Ghobadi's films seem to be in no way 'outward' looking, but instead focus on the contemporary problems of Iranian populations. By prompting these populations to work towards the construction of their own futures, Ghobadi's position seems to be clearly situated within Iran. With this in mind, it is unfortunate that Ghobadi has been forced to leave Iran because of his continued filmmaking despite being blacklisted from film production. Though he dedicates himself to the creation of future peoples, like the characters in his films, he himself can no longer pursue the construction of 'hope' inside Iran.

His imperative departure from Iran provides a fitting case study for looking at the construction of modern political films though. As I've argued at the beginning of this chapter, the dominant discourse in Iranian filmmaking is the Islamic ideology that dictates the construction of film-texts in material and ideological terms. While Ghobadi's films do not necessarily stand in opposition to Islamic law – even *No One Knows About Persian Cats* almost entirely follows the restrictions of the Sharia placed on filmmaking in Iran, even though it did not actually go through the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance – they allow the emergence of a people that are critical of religion being used to reinforce the regulatory power of a ruling class. And while these films can be banned, the people they depict cannot, and they will continue to emerge as a force of change within Iran. This variation is already present in the media, as the validity of Ahmadinejad's election was questioned by Iranian's referring to themselves as the 'Green Movement'. Rather than directly critique the majoritarian Islamic ideology, these modern political films establish the grounds for change at a molecular level through the production of a more diverse people than official discourses can account for.

Jia Zhangke's Pre-Hodology:
Witnessing Economic Reform in the People's Republic of China

While Ghobadi, and other critical Iranian filmmakers like Mohsen Makhmalbaf, started their careers working within the state managed filmmaking system and eventually sought ways to make films without the state, Sixth Generation Chinese films followed the opposite trajectory while sharing a similar relation to state-based censorship. Certain Sixth Generation directors such as Jia Zhangke and Wang Xiaoshuai desired to produce independent films due to the difficulties of starting out in the People's Republic of China (PRC) state-controlled studio system. These directors may have also shown a critical consciousness in their works, but in the early to mid-1990's, the PRC's control of film studios made their attempt to eschew these state institutions a blatant move in its own right. Initial attempts at independent filmmaking did not go unnoticed by the government, and films such as Wang's *The Days* (1993), Zhang Yuan's *Beijing Bastards* (1993), and He Jianjun's *Red Beads* (1994) were banned, prompting a governmental blacklisting of these newly graduated directors. As a result, from their inception as a 'wave' of filmmakers, the Sixth Generation directors have been perceived as undermining state order. Unlike the Iranian context, however, incurring the state's wrath proved to be a smart business decision for many of these directors, as it allowed them to tap into global flows of circulation, distribution, and capital. Using this international success, Jia Zangke reentered the home market in China with his first officially accepted film, *The World* (2004). While Jia claims otherwise, his desire to find distribution in China despite overseas fame suggests political motivation, considering his films address increasing economic reform and transformation in China and their impact on Chinese subjects. Rather than a religious subject, like the previous two chapters, however, Jia's

films chart the emergence of subjects structured by their relation to global capitalism's spread of cultural and economic ideologies.

Jia's films operate on a political register by focusing predominantly on subjects caught up in a transitional phase for China, economic liberalization and urbanization in particular, highlighting the ability for certain subjects to adapt to broader transformations and the tragic consequences for those who cannot. Jia's films, such as *Xiao Wu* (1998), *Unknown Pleasures* (2002), and even the officially accepted *The World,* operate according to a Post-Socialist Realism, which counters ideological overcoding with an existential realism (Berry 2007, McGrath 2007, and Zhang 2007). This gap between official discourses on economic reform and the experiences of subjects depicted in his films points to a rupture in the integrity of the majoritarian narrative of the PRC. Jia introduces this rupture through the construction of seer-like subjects, who witness the evolution of life around them instead of acting out a predetermined way of being in the world, and by operating according to a Post-Socialist Realist Time – a form of time notable for its long takes and slow pace (McGrath 2007, 89). In doing so, Jia's seers question, and lead viewers to question, the efficacy of China's rapid economic growth. By focusing on subjects that cannot weather the transitions taking place in China, Jia's films point to intolerable features of this economic growth through the failures of biopolitical production (in Jia's films, the failure to become globalized capitalists). These failures, and their depiction on screen, create another space, or time, where the liberalization of China's economy can be questioned. Key to the creation of this space, however, is that it comes not through an

oppositional politics that would substitute another political or economic mode for the PRC's ideology. Instead, Jia's films draw upon the difference between perceptions of globalism and actual felt affects, and collapses distinctions between these registers to reveal an immanent terrain where minor and majoritarian positions coexist, both in terms of critical attitudes towards globalization and the people that make up its operation. In other words, Jia creates dichotomies in his films only to collapse them, refuting a 'solution'. In doing so, Jia's political claim prompts a more active, rather than ideologically driven, approach to the intolerable features of the rapid economic growth and urbanization in China.

A Cinema that Bears Witness, a Cinema of Seers

> The sensory-motor break makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought.
>
> *Gilles Deleuze*

Appropriate to the focus on rapid economic growth, Zhang Zhen names Sixth Generation filmmakers the 'Urban Generation', and argues that these films include a "combination of melodrama and a form of critical realism . . . allow[ing] the filmmakers to explore the dialectic relationship between the cinematic and the social, both in form and content" (Zhang 2007, 7). In other words, these films are technically fiction films, but they portray real life experiences, or experiences familiar to the peoples being depicted. Adding to this realism, Sixth Generation films often employ on location shooting, non-professional actors, and rely on the actual experiences of the peoples being filmed, further denigrating hard classifications of these films as fiction. The emphasis on the daily lives of Chinese citizens is historically significant for Chinese

filmmaking, because it illustrates how “contemporary filmmakers depart consciously from the more didactic tradition of Chinese cinema as a whole, be it critical realism or socialist realism, by taking up instead a more humble position of the witness who produces testimonials rather than epistles” (7). Zhang refers specifically the break between films with a strong nationalist tendency that emerged in the 1930's and borrowed Hollywood aesthetics[4] that were echoed later by more recent films such as *Hero* (2002; though *Hero* is not a work of socialist-realism proper as these earlier films were). The film that produces epistles, an overtly didactic letter to 'the people', produces an ideologically motivated telos and depicts subjects appropriate to the accompanying vision of the nation, whereas Zhang sees the Urban Generation as 'bearing witness'. I take up Zhang's concept of 'bearing witness' here, because it is indicative of the types of characters found in Jia's films. Specifically, characters who 'bear witness', because they cannot take action due to their inability to assimilate into new visions of Chinese society. This inability to act results in a series of failed gestures from Jia's characters, which produces a cinematic stuttering. I contend, however, that this stuttering introduces the potential for political discussion by pointing out what is intolerable in Jia's films.

When Zhang uses the terms 'witness' and 'testimonials', she draws upon a tradition of 'witnessing' in documentary and non-fiction film. In his seminal piece “Witnessing”, John Durham Peters draws out the theoretical complexity of witnessing:

> The term involves all three points of a basic communication triangle: (1) the agent who bears witness, (2) the utterance or text itself, (3) the audience who witnesses. It is thus a strange but intelligible sentence to say: the witness (speech-act) of the witness (person) was witnessed (by an audience). (Peters 2008, 25)

[4] See Zhu 1998, 56-66.

When Zhang says that 'contemporary filmmakers' take up the 'more humble position of the witness', we could interpret this to mean that the directors themselves are acting in the position of the witness. They do so insofar as they bear witness to modern conditions in China, create utterances (film-texts) reflecting what they've witnessed, and these utterances are consumed by an audience who in turn witnesses the events depicted. This is an important point, which I will return to later, because it suggests that both the production and consumption of films with these characters that bear witness constitutes significant political action in the mobilization of peoples on screen and off. At the same time, however, Zhang refers mainly to fiction films, whereas Peters locates witnessing in “nonfiction genres such as news, sports, and documentary”, which helps to illustrate a point where fiction and documentary start to come together in Sixth Generation films (23). They are works of fiction, yet at the same time they seem to 'bear witness' to social, economic, and psychological change in China. Furthermore, Zhang is particularly interested in a “group of floating new urban subjects”, which has “become one of the defining features of the new urban cinema” (Zhen 2007, 6). For Zhang, this 'new subject' is important because it “foregrounds the radical unevenness of this [urbanizing] process, which has created new class divisions and social inequity and hence some of the most glaring contradictions in China's latest drive towards modernization” (6). One might infer that it is not exactly the directors who are witnessing, in this instance, but these floating urban subjects who have the most immediate contact and experience with the social, economic, and psychological processes presented in Sixth Generation films. Since I am addressing the potential for fictional subjects to bear witness to conditions that reflect real world situations, creating

affective assemblages where the status of the film is less important than the political connections it enters in to, it may be more appropriate to define these characters as what Deleuze would call seers.

For Deleuze, the 'seer' is a figure of post-World War Two cinema that presents one symptom of the break between the sensory-motor schemata of pre-World War Two films and the sensory-motor break resulting from World War Two. As I argued previously, the sensory-motor break occurred when it was no longer possible to clearly see what action had to be taken, which coincided with the crumbling of nationalisms and disenchantment with enlightenment rationalism (these are two readings based on Deleuze's initial articulation: for more on crumbling nationalism, see David Martin-Jones 2006; for more on enlightenment rationalism, see my introduction). The child who wanders amongst the rubble of *Germany Year Zero* (1948) is the prototypical seer, who *sees* (witnesses) the destruction World War Two has wrought, but knows not how to *act*. To understand how this might be applied to the context of Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers, it is useful to look at how Julian Reid juxtaposes a traditional concept of the seer from theater with this more modern, Deleuzian and cinematic conception:

> Classically, within theater, the seer was conceived and portrayed in his or her exceptionality... a highly particular power to whom a people turned at moments of crisis, giving them direction with which to recover their bearings, in order to resume the journey on which they would eventually secure their truths. What modern cinema does, however, is to democratize the seer by depicting him or her in everyday life while also laying stress on the quotidian and fugitive experience of “seeing” within postwar societies. (Reid 2011, 228)

Reid's distinction between types of seers helps to differentiate between the classical

politics addressed in my first chapter and a more modern politics, but also to understand Zhang's argument. The former, classical seer served a didactic function: it taught 'a people' what to do or how to be. The latter, modern seer, however, does not teach or act, but sees. In this way, it is a *witness* rather than an *agent*, and although fictional in terms of the characters Zhang and Reid are discussing, it conforms to the characteristics of a witness that Peters discusses. In closing the gap between fiction and documentary, the seer is a fictional character that bears witness to particular conditions, and communicates this witnessing to a real film-audience. In Zhang's words, it is not 'didactic' but serves to 'witness'.

For Reid, ability of the seer to 'witness' results in its power to see the *intolerable*. While true for Deleuze also, in Reid's account, the seer's encounter with the intolerable is precisely where its political function lies. The 'seer' for Reid describes “Characters confronted with images too intolerable for them to bear; images that produce stuttering enunciations, failed political gestures, acts of violence, or self-sacrifice. In every case there is an overt political context to these encounters with the intolerable” (230). While there may be real life correlation with the events these seers encounter, however, they are ultimately fictional representations. The child who picks through the rubble of World War Two in *Germany Year Zero* can only be encountered by spectators as a representation of a child picking through the rubble of World War Two. This paradoxical situation, the real life correlation with fictional representation, is the domain of the seer and posits the limits of its powers due to what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub refer to as the 'crisis of witnessing'. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski review this problematic in

Media Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Mass Communication: "At the core of this paradigm is the impossibility of bearing witness: the traumatic event that has left its survivors speechless, not because they did not witness it, but rather because they did so all too overwhelmingly" (Frosh and Pinchevski 2008, 3). Witnessing, then, is an impossible act without an interlocutor when encountering the intolerable. For discourse surrounding the act of witnessing, the Holocaust is the primary example of this problematic. By taking the intolerable to the extreme, the Holocaust presents a traumatic event so powerful it "succeeded in extinguishing the internal witness of its victims, convincing them that their experiences were indeed incommunicable even themselves, never mind to others" (3). Though this seems to strip the act of witnessing from its political potential by suggesting that communicating the intolerable is impossible, the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale provides an example of how the intolerable becomes translatable through an interlocutor. In this case, Dori Laub, a holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, acted as the interlocutor by collecting first hand accounts and experiences of the holocaust on video in order to preserve the intolerable and to make it communicable to a larger audience. The cinematic seer, I argue in turn, serves a similar function as an interlocutor that bears witness to the intolerable so that the intolerability might be communicated to a wider audience. This role ultimately mobilizes politics through cinema in the overall goal of creating "another kind of perception, out of which a different post-national type of people may emerge... an intolerant people of seers that desires the transformation of the conditions of its suffering" (Reid 2011, 231). In other words, the seers are characters in films, but as spectators of these seers, there is the possibility "of our becoming seers" alongside these

characters, allowing viewers a similar power to see what is cliché or intolerable in their own lives (231).

Becoming-seer defines one complex process by which modern political films mobilize audiences. Zhang aptly labels the products of Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers a 'minor cinema', but this designation becomes more useful when she discusses the consumption practices that have formed around these films (Zhang 2007, 1). Specifically, Zhang focuses on the Unrestricted New Image Festival, which realized the "possibility of forming a 'minor' and 'nomadic' film culture that engages both the margins and the center" (31). While particularly successful, this is only one venue amongst others that serve to deliver these films to audiences that are open to their message, aesthetics, and affect – in other words, venues that assist the film-texts themselves in mobilizing publics and reaching particular demographics. Ultimately, Zhang believes that it is "The intimate movie bars, the nomadic style of the cineclub operations, and the diversity of the chosen film forms and formats (especially the shorts and DV film) [that] encapsulate this grassroots movement as a "minor cinema" that potentially can reshape the structure of film knowledge and practice" (32). I will address some of the particular demographics that are being accessed through these forms of distribution later in this chapter, but more immediately I want to draw attention to the idea of 'reshaping the structure of film knowledge and practice' that Zhang sees as the revolutionary or 'minor' effect of Urban Generation films, and as what I would call modern political films. The delivery of films to particular demographics joins with the possibility of a collective becoming-seer in each instance of distribution and

consumption when films challenge particular molar alignments of subjectivity, and promote biopolitical production. That is not to say that these films are didactic in the sense that they are configuring particular ways of seeing the world, as might have been the goal of the FLN in *Battle of Algiers* when enforcing an Islamic-Algerian subjectivity, but that they are presenting an audience with what is intolerable to that audience, so they might be mobilized to take up the task of reshaping and restructuring not only film knowledge and practice, but also social knowledge and practice. As with biopolitical production, becoming-seer presents an alternative to official histories and forms of discourse, a task that film is well suited to if it finds distribution or access to peoples it can form an affective assemblage with.

While Zhang's use of 'witnessing' and 'testimonial' to describe the products of Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers shows how they operate as modern political films, these films do not take on the full characteristics of what documentary or trauma studies might refer to as the account of the witness. There is complex interplay of terms and ideas between a Deleuzian notion of the seer and the discourse surrounding the witness, particularly around the issue of *the intolerable*. For both lines of thinking, the intolerable is the locus of political function. For Laub, the intolerable was something in the stories of Holocaust survivors that must not be lost, because it serves as an ethical and political mobilizer. For Reid, finding a way to *see* the intolerable precedes the ability to change present, intolerable realities. By looking at the function of the intolerable, we can forward Zhang's argument regarding witnessing in Sixth Generation Chinese films. Specifically, characters of Jia's films become seers when their general

inability to act reveals the economic changes taking place in China that lead directly to this inability to act. I will use Jia's *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasures* as two case studies, because these films mark both a break from the studio system in China and the formation of an alternative discourse in cinema. Labeled political by the government, these films present a sense of how economic change and increasing global networks of communication created intolerable qualities of modern life for urban youths at the time of their creation. After examining the politics of these earlier films, I will return to Jia's later films, *The World* in particular, to evaluate what political aspects of his filmmaking remain despite being welcomed by the PRC.

Aimless Youths in Post-socialist China: Jia's *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasures*

> I hope it is a newly-built world, a newly-built culture. It is not to rebel against anything, it is just a new culture.
> *Jia Zhangke*

In films such as *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasures*, Jia claims that he has tried to film the 'Birth Control Generation': children born soon after the one child policy was introduced in China. Jia describes this generation as suffering feelings of emptiness, bleakness, and loneliness and says that although there may be many roads connected by motorways, "you don't know what the direction is, or which is the way forward" (Jia 2002). He juxtaposes these characters in *Unknown Pleasures* from his characters in *Platform* (2000), who drift, but still "have a kind of music": a goal they are legitimately or passionately interested in pursuing (Jia 2002). With *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasures*, the characters lack the expectations, even if they are failed expectations, that drive the characters in *Platform* and Wang's films. In the same interview, Jia follows this discussion by talking about his own filmmaking practice: "I think making a film is like

exploring... you know roughly the direction, you know where you are going, but on the road, what experience you will have, what you will see and feel, you don't know that at all" (Jia 2002). This conception of filmmaking mimics the characters' aimlessness, but also shows a resistance to creating didactic representations on film, or a resistance to the sensory-motor schema of the action-image. Despite being proclaimed political by the PRC and western distributors of his film, he actually elucidates a more nuanced idea of his politics that more accurately resembles the work of a modern political film. As the epigraph illustrates, he seeks not to create an oppositional political cinema, but one that expresses the experience of the new generation of Chinese after the one child policy, whose overwhelming characteristic, Jia argues, is aimlessness itself. On a more political register, however, this pre-hodological experience reveals the divisive effects of economic reform on individual subjects in the post-socialist era.

Deleuze used the term 'hodological' to explain the psychological direction and motivations of characters, which in turn structure film narratives. He associated the hodological space (of characters) with the sensory-motor schema and the topological psychology of Kurt Lewin. While he spends little time explaining the concept of hodology – Deleuze assumes a working knowledge of Lewin's *Principles of Topological Psychology* (1936) – his comments suggest the intersection between subject-psychology and film-narrative are integral to his cinematic categories based on time and movement. Deleuze argues, for example, that "the sensory-motor schema is concretely located in a 'hodological space' (Kurt Lewin)"... and that "This economy of narration... appears both in the concrete shape of the action-image and hodological

space" (Deleuze 2003, 127, 128; the insertion of (Kurt Lewin) is Deleuze's, showing his desire to clearly illustrate the source of his concepts here). In *Principles of Topological Psychology*, Lewin advances the concept of 'psychological life space' to explain the hodological space an individual exists in, which in turn determines what is and what is not possible from that individual based on their environment. He begins, "we shall use the term psychological life space to indicate the totality of facts which determine the behavior of an individual at a certain moment" (Lewin 1936, 12). By introducing this argument to the cinematic medium, however, Deleuze suggests that, as viewers, we can infer what characters may or may not do based on the 'psychological life space' the film creates, thereby creating an assemblage of subject psychology and film narrative unified under the term 'hodological space'. A hodological space, however, would be aligned with the action-image and clear narrative direction, the linkage of causes and effects that drives a narrative to a particular conclusion, whereas "[There] is a space before action... It is a pre-hodological space... an undecidability of the body" (Deleuze 2003, 203). It is this pre-hodological space and undecidability that Jia evokes in his films *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasures*. Since Kurt Lewin's great contribution to psychology was that a subject's environment intimately affects their psychological composition, I argue that the presentation of a pre-hodological space in Jia's films reveals something important about the rapid economic reform in China as reflected in this particular (lack of) narrative direction. Namely, that the economic and social changes resulting from these post-socialist economics present something intolerable to Jia's characters about the direction their social, economic, and cultural environments are moving in, with the rapid globalization and capitalization of their society. I will now turn to *Xiao Wu* and then

Unknown Pleasures in order to illustrate how Jia constructs pre-hodological narratives.

Xiao Wu follows the pickpocket Xiao Wu amidst urbanization in Fenyang as he enters the stage of his life where his friends have begun moving on, getting jobs, and getting married. A number of his friends begin to find purpose in particular things in their lives, hodological direction, but Xiao still embodies the aimlessness Jia discusses in interviews. In *Xiao Wu*, the form of the film reflects the pre-hodological aimlessness of its protagonist. Jia says of his filmmaking in general, that "If [a film] only goes forward from beginning to end, and that's the destination, then I find this film to be uninteresting. The important thing is what one comes across on the journey" (Jia 2002). True to his statement, *Xiao Wu* follows Xiao Wu in a meandering fashion as he picks pockets, meets old friends, and goes about his daily life. Describing the aimlessness this evokes, Chris Berry and McGrath argue that the stylistic conventions, including long takes and 'narrative distension', contribute to "a radical vision of postsocialist realist time countering any master narrative of teleological progress" (McGrath 2007, 90). These 'master narratives' are not articulated through the form of the film *Xiao Wu*, due to the 'narrative distention' created by the aimless or pre-hodological nature of the narrative, but rather in the mediated representations on radio and television. Amidst Xiao's drifting about Fenyang, the government announces new policies to crack down on pick pockets and petty criminals. The news is delivered through radio broadcasts, and the police set up a booth to inform the public, prompting Xiao's friends who have moved on from their lives of petty crime to continually urge Xiao to "calm down for a while", because "they mean it this time". Every time, Xiao brushes the advice aside,

claiming that he has stopped pickpocketing. Often the advice from friends involves suggesting that Xiao pick up a new trade, as they proceed to remark on his once-criminal friend Xiao Yong's success, “Take a look at Xiao Yong, he's really on the way up”. Eventually, a dichotomy is established between Xiao Wu and Xiao Yong that marks Xiao Wu as unsophisticated or backwards because he relies on the skills he learned in his youth, rather than taking up modern business practices to keep up with the PRC's market-oriented reforms initiated in 1978 (Chu and So 2010, 46). Xiao Yong, on the other hand, is heralded as an adept of these new business practices, and he is featured on television and nominated “model entrepreneur”. As a result, a majoritarian – insofar as it is constructed by the state and propagated through state media within the film – dichotomy separates Xiao Wu and Xiao Yong between old illegitimate business and new legitimate business, aimlessness and clear purpose, a sensory-motor break and a sensory-motor schemata. The film compounds this separation through the pre-hodological formal aesthetics that help articulate Xiao Wu's story.

The film disrupts the veracity of this official or majoritarian dichotomy and invites political critique by confusing what constitutes legitimate or 'good' business practices. The dichotomy begins to break down when Xiao Wu responds to his new girlfriend Mei Mei calling him a 'big spender' by saying, “I'm an artisan... I work with my hands”. Although he may be trying to hide his true occupation as a pickpocket from a romantic interest, he also crafts a romantic view of his labor. While he claims no extra-moral position, as Michel seems to do in Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), Xiao Wu is different from your average pickpocket. In the beginning of the film, he is tasked with

recovering an ID that was inside of a stolen wallet, because “getting a new id isn't easy”. He successfully finds the ID, helping it get back to its owner, and towards the end of the film the viewer learns that Xiao Wu has been putting the ID cards of all the wallets he steals in mailboxes where they are turned into the police station and eventually returned to their owners. In this respect, Xiao Wu's actions portray him as more honorable and compassionate than your average ruffian. The film reveals Xiao Yong's business, on the other hand, to be the exporting of cigarettes and semi-legal prostitution. Xiao Wu compares his 'trade' to Xiao Yong's by arguing, “his money from illicit cigarette deals and club girls aren't so clean, either!”. Xiao Wu recognizes that Xiao Yong's 'entrepreneurship' is perhaps even more ill-founded than his own petty theft, but the community of Fenyang hardly recognizes this as Xiao Yong donates 30,000 Yuan to the 'Hope Project'. The confusion of this previously established dichotomy illustrates the way that *Xiao Wu* operates as a work of 'Post-Socialist Realism' through stripping ideological positions of their truth-value. Jason McGrath defines Post-Socialist Realism by arguing, “rather than professing to show an ideological truth that underlies apparent reality, it seeks to reveal a raw, underlying reality by stripping away the ideological representations that distort it” (McGrath 2007, 83-84). Xiao Yong is only *officially* a 'model entrepreneur', or an entrepreneur in the majoritarian, PRC-established ideology of the time. In fact, his donation of 30,000 Yuan shows him to be an adept manipulator of the media, which helps to construct majoritarian discourse itself in the film. Xiao Wu on the other hand is *officially* a petty criminal, but as viewers follow his experiences firsthand, they find a more complicated character. As McGrath explains regarding the films of Jia and his cohort of Sixth Generation filmmakers, “This tactic of exposing

rather than opposing rests upon the belief that social contradictions are apparent in everyday life but elided in representation... [and] thus imbued with the faith that just going out into public with a camera and capturing the unvarnished street life found there serves to unmask ideology while documenting the realities of contemporary China" (85). Revealing the disruption of boundaries between 'model entrepreneur' and 'thief' illustrates the film's political critique. Drawing Xiao Yong's officially approved role towards the realities of the thief begins to present questions of whether the officially sanctioned position is as pure as ideology would have it appear.

While a majoritarian discourse emerges from the changing economy depicted in *Xiao Wu,* privileging a new capitalist class, the film also examines the divisions created in populations through the change in market practices by delving in to the psychological life space of its characters as reflected in the play between hodological and pre-hodological narrative structures. Since the film follows Xiao Wu, the viewer does not experience Xiao Yong's psychological life space – though I would argue his clear focus on monetary profit and image within the community suggests a fairly teleological focus. Instead, the film illustrates this division through Xiao Wu's experimentation with a more direct, hodological telos. Halfway through the film, Xiao meets a woman named Mei Mei who works as a 'companion' at a karaoke bar. Contrary to the first half of the film, Xiao Wu falls in love with Mei Mei, which prompts him to construct a socially approved, and ideologically appropriate, telos as illustrated through the sudden clarity of narrative direction this encounter creates. Prior to this point, Xiao Wu has little direction in his life, a seeming lack of goals and motivations, and it is difficult to

determine what action he will take next in the film directly. This pre-hodological abundance of narrative potential is reined in, however, when Xiao shifts his focus towards Mei Mei. For a time, Xiao Wu enters a similar teleology to Xiao Yong. The first indicator of this shifted teleology is Xiao Wu's engagement party and quest to buy an engagement ring. The direction of Xiao Wu's life becomes clear for himself, and for viewers of the film, as his desire to buy a wedding ring for Mei Mei creates a clear narrative direction for the film accompanied by causal events – romancing Mei Mei, celebrating with friends, and purchasing an engagement ring. The dichotomy between Xiao Wu and Xiao Yong again collapses as they both take on the socially acceptable life-narratives of settling down, and, importantly for the status of witnessing in the film, the hodological narrative loses the film's earlier critical focus on witnessing the rapid urbanization of the city. This brief experiment with a clear narrative direction soon crumples, creating a sharp distinction between a hodological and pre-hodological narrative. Mei Mei disappears suddenly, shattering the sensory-motor connections established by Xiao Wu's relationship with her. Confused, he wanders up and down the street, eventually deciding to go to Mei Mei's apartment, which she has vacated. The camera takes Xiao's point of view as he eyes wander around the vacated apartment, and he begins to become agitated. Angry, he returns to his parents' home and offers the wedding ring to his mother, signaling the end of this brief teleology that is constructed in the film, which further emphasizes the film's overall aimlessness by offering an example of what narrative direction might look like in *Xiao Wu,* if it had a more traditional narrative.

Xiao Wu's return to his parents' home reveals the critical trajectory of the film, and the way in which a pre-hodological time and space accompanies its wandering narrative. The film lapses into a parody of older Socialist Realist films, as Xiao Wu's father questions the veracity of the ring: “We've been poor peasants for three generations... Is it made of gold or copper?” and after a brief interlude, begins talking about farming with his other son, “Are the fields ploughed... What'll you plant this year?”. Xiao Wu sits off to the side, not able to take part of this conversation about 'legitimate' business. When Xiao Wu realizes the ring he gave his mother was given to his brother for his engagement, Xiao Wu becomes upset, asking for the ring back. His father replies, “There are family rules to be respected” and “If I'd known, I would have drowned you in a urinal at birth”, responding to Xiao Wu's breach of collective, familial protocol and status as a thief. After being chased out of the house by his father with a stick, a single long shot depicts Xiao Wu's departure, which marks the return to a Post-Socialist Realist Time and its intersection with the seer function I locate in Jia's early films. Beginning as a long shot of Xiao Wu walking down a dirt road, the frame remains static as he walks into a medium close-up. The camera then begins to rotate slowly in a 270 degree turn, as a loudspeaker discusses the reunification of Hong Kong. Despite the promised reintegration of Hong Kong, a wealthy and modern region of China, this shot depicts a village with dirt roads and stone buildings in various states of disrepair in probing detail through narrative distension. Focusing on the role narrative distension has played in Chinese cinema, Harry H. Kuoshu argues it functions “like the unresolved, often meandering plots of the modernist novel... or the voids in the slowly unrolled Chinese scroll painting, both of which call upon and make space for the audience to engage in

critical thought" (Kuoshu 297). Similarly, I would argue that this narrative distension examples the sensory-motor break in the film and invites 'critical thought', where Xiao Wu, cast out of the Socialist Realist narrative, does not know what action to take. In this shot, Xiao Wu approaches the camera, pauses, and looks from side to side, seemingly unsure of which direction to take before the shot begins to rotate. At this moment, he exists in the pre-hodological space 'before action', where Xiao Wu, and the viewers in turn, are left to witness the juxtaposition of the loudspeaker that plays "anyone who wants a slice of pork, please come to my house", an idealized reference to modernization, and the small town where Xiao Wu's family lives.

Eventually, Xiao Wu wanders back into Fenyang where he witnesses shop owners vacating their buildings to make way for them to be demolished and rebuilt as part of China's reconstruction, a part of the economic reform sweeping China. Xiao Wu's friend comments critically, "The old stuff is coming down, but I see nothing new". Since Xiao Wu's hope of settling down has been revoked by Mei Mei's departure, he returns to his old aimlessness and eventually attempts to pick a pocket while wandering amongst the shops of Fenyang. He is caught in the act, and brought into the police station. In the film's most surreal moment, Xiao Wu is left to watch a television program on Fenyang's new, harsher criminal policies, which interviews various townsfolk about Xiao's own arrest. Each person interviewed discusses how appreciative they are that Xiao has been arrested. The conversations shown on the TV are clearly part of an official program dedicated to reinforcing a particular ideological understanding of crime and petty theft in Fenyang, part of the new 'society of control', and they run counter to many of the

responses to Xiao Wu throughout the film that treat him as a person rather than a label: 'thief'. The film ends with Xiao Wu being handcuffed to a telephone pole in public, as crowds gather to look at him with curiosity, a song playing just prior to this with the lyrics: “May I ask you all, who is the hero?”

With this ending, *Xiao Wu* argues, as a work of Post-Socialist Realism, that there is no place for the lived reality of the lower classes within the urbanization and market reform Xiao Wu 'bears witness' to. This witnessing takes on an extra layer, however, as *Xiao Wu* draws attention to this act of witnessing by introducing extra-cinematic witnesses into the text itself. As I explained previously, Peters defines witnessing in film-texts as being composed of three components: agent, text, audience (Peters 2008, 25). Throughout *Xiao Wu*, Xiao Wu has acted as the agent (though fictional), *Xiao Wu* the film has functioned as the text, and the audiences who view *Xiao Wu* are the audiences who also bear witness to the political topics of the film, such as the rapid urbanization, market reform, and division between classes. The end of the film refocuses on the act of witnessing itself, however, by filming audiences actually caught up in the act of witnessing. In the last moments of the film, where Xiao Wu is handcuffed to a pole in public, the camera turns to the actual bystanders in Fenyang who were walking down the street during the filming of this scene in *Xiao Wu*. Naturally, they congregate to see what is happening, and the camera turns to film their curiosity. By responding with curiosity, rather than condemnation as the majoritarian narratives previously suggested via news on the television, this real audience reiterates the question posed by the song: “who is the hero?” The film ultimately breaks from its fictional narrative to show real

people on the streets of Fenyang, an entire crowd bearing witness, and it is significant that the final images of this film are ambiguous in that these spectators seem to bear no moral judgment on Xiao Wu despite his being handcuffed. This is staged to a degree, as the spectators are most likely curious about the fact that there is a camera and Xiao Wu is being filmed, but it presents a break with the majoritarian discourse as it has been playing out in the film, and fragments the clear-cut notions of proper subject-positions that the state attempts to mobilize in the film. As China's economy begins globalizing and becoming more capitalist, *Xiao Wu* operates as a modern political film by revealing the effects of such market reform on individuals and fragmenting the attempts to construct official understandings of these subjects. This operates through the pre-hodological narrative of the film, as Xiao Wu wanders and witnesses, but the act of witnessing itself takes on extra significance in the final moments of this film.

Despite the fact that these questions the film ultimately asks are most relevant for citizens of China, *Xiao Wu* did not have much of an impact inside China intially. Globally, the film did very well, picking up distributors in France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong (Zhang 2006, 37-38). The film also garnered 1,100,000 francs for television rights and another project to be made in France (38). Yingjin Zhang juxtaposes these successes abroad with the films reception in China:

> A few film screenings [of *Xiao Wu*] in Beijing in 1998 generated mixed but mostly negative responses, at least to the best of Jia Zhangke's knowledge. The first one at Beijing University was hosted by the poet Xie Mian and attended by thirty or so faculty members, but one of them criticized the film for describing China as a poverty-stricken third-world country. (38)

In other words, the film was criticized for *self-orientalizing,* or depicting China as a third world country to western audience who want to embark on a cinematic tour of impoverished peoples. Gary Xu counters this argument, however, pointing out the complicated nature of how Sixth Generation filmmakers "consciously resist the tendency of self-Orientalization in Fifth Generation filmmaking, which focuses on 'traditional' and 'premodern' China; on the other hand, their realist representation of contemporary China's social issues continues to reinforce impressions of China's differences" (Lu 2010, 107; see also Pickowicz 2006, 13 for a reversal of this argument). Sheldon Lu extends this argument in saying: "the point of departure of this new generation is the present moment rather than some mythical past that is exoticized for the gaze of the international audience" (107). In other words, while certain scholars criticize Sixth Generation filmmakers, others extend Rey Chow's argument in *Primitive Passions,* that Fifth Generation films actually contained a reflexive quality, to Sixth Generation films, which are perhaps even more effective than their Fifth Generation counterparts due to the realism of these latter films (Chow 1995, 171). Both critics in China and abroad have noticed the self-orientalizing trend in Sixth Generation films, despite their contentious interpretations, and *Xiao Wu's* great success abroad lends evidence to the veracity of their critiques. As a result, it becomes complicated as to whether Jia's political thrust in his early films has had much effect in China.

I raise these questions not to challenge the political efficacy of Jia's films, but to highlight their particular patterns of reception. Despite the commercial and 'box office' failure of Jia's films in China, it is not true that the films weren't seen entirely, and, as

Zhang argues, 'minor' and 'nomadic' film cultures may lend themselves more to mobilizing spectators. There are a great deal of alternative markets in China for film consumption and discussion, as detailed by scholars such as Chen Mo, Seio Nakajima, Zhiwei Xiao, and Zhang Zhen.[5] Jia himself was well aware of these alternative markets, and in an interview states how important it is to him that his films were being distributed via VCD, despite the fact that he sees no economic reward from such distribution (Jia 2008). Seio breaks reception within China down more carefully in his article "Film Clubs in Beijing: The Cultural Consumption of Chinese Independent Films". Seio's article is particularly useful as an ethnographic study of the audience members who visit each of the film clubs he researched. His study reveals that Chinese independent films such as *Xiao Wu* are being watched in China, but mostly by students and artists, particularly students coming from the Beijing Film Academy and Central Academy of Fine Arts (Seio 2006). Although this study is limited to Beijing, the results temper accusations of self-orientalizing and pandering to western audiences. Furthermore, Seio shows that films are being actively discussed in groups post-screening at several of the film clubs he examined. For the modern political film, which potentially mobilizes the production of subjectivity, this is an important point to consider. If the modern political film is to mobilize a public, the questions of *how* and to *what ends* are paramount. Often, it is difficult to determine how a film mobilizes a public beyond the film's spectatorship. In the context of Beijing, however, this can be extended to include discussions of films and even further artistic creation as the

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[5] "Chinese Underground Films: Critical Views from China", Chen Mo and Zhiwei Xiao, and "Film Clubs in Beijing: The cultural Consumption of Chinese Independent Films", Seio Nakajima, *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China*. "Bearing Witness: Chinese Urban Cinema in the Era of "Transformation"", Zhang Zhen, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*.

demographic of these clubs involves artists. *Xiao Wu* answers to what end it mobilizes publics as a work of modern political film fairly clearly, however: it asks viewers to question their daily, existential experience in its confrontation with *official* or state discourse and ideology. In doing so, it creates a people critically aware of state policy and uses of media amongst student and arts communities.

Although I addressed the pre-hodological or 'wandering' nature of *Xiao Wu*, Jia takes this aesthetic much further in his third feature *Unknown Pleasures*. Jia created *Unknown Pleasures* after his generational epic, *Platform*. These three films are thought to create an informal trilogy, and they connect indirectly in their distinct use of Post-Socialist Realist Time with their slow pacing and existential focus (and even directly when Xiao Wu shows up in *Unknown Pleasures*). Two features of *Unknown Pleasures* make it important to address after *Xiao Wu*: the way its politics are much less explicit and embedded more within the aesthetics of the film, and the way it borrows from *Platform* in focusing more on a generation or a particular 'people' than particular protagonists. While it is the case that *Unknown Pleasures* follows two protagonists who are fairly well developed as individuals, they also exemplify the 'Birth Control Generation' in general for Jia: a generation of individuals intimately affected by the wielding of regulatory biopower on the part of the People's Republic of China. Zhang recounts that the 'documentary method' of *Xiao Wu* – shooting on location, using non-professional actors, and even including the public not affiliated with the film – was “critical for the particular kind of story [Jia] wanted to tell about people *in* their social milieu. It is an aesthetic grounded in social space and experience” (Zhen 2007, 19). I would also

suggest that this interest in social milieus grounded in social space and experience informs the setting for *Unknown Pleasures* as well. McGrath notes one important difference between Jia's earlier films and *Unknown Pleasures* in the latter film's "use of a pair of stylish and attractive lead characters" that makes the film seem "to have a younger and hipper appeal bordering on the commercial" (McGrath 2007, 104). Already, Jia seems to be catering his films to an even more specific demographic in the urban youth of the Birth Control Generation, who will be viewing this film in film clubs and on pirated VCDs, two themes addressed explicitly in *Unknown Pleasures*.

Despite the seeming savvy with which Jia targets a particular generation, the film's narrative has little to say about the direction of this generation, repeating the aimlessness and pre-hodological nature of *Xiao Wu,* which I argue results in the portrayal of these individuals of the Birth Control Generation as seers. The inability to say anything about the direction of this generation plays out to such a degree, that the film becomes almost banal, more so than *Xiao Wu*. The setting of the film is a bleak Datong full of demolished buildings and construction sites that is reminiscent of the 'any-space whatever' where Deleuze locates the 'seer' in post-war cinema. While it might be possible to find correlation between the rampant capitalist progress featured in many Sixth Generation Chinese films and the destruction of World War Two, McGrath more aptly highlights the purpose in creating "a bombed-out looking backdrop that silently repudiates the colorful fashions of its youthful protagonists" (104). The film presents a dichotomy between the visually vibrant youth and the setting they inhabit, which plays out thematically as well as visually in the way that these characters 'wander' in the film

and are unable to find ways to occupy their time. McGrath's reading of this aimlessness is useful for my argument regarding the seer-like nature of the film's protagonists:

> The film's Chinese title, meaning "allowed to wander free and easy," is borrowed from a contemporary popular song that appears twice in the film. The song title itself echoes the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, who used *xiaoyao*, or "carefree wandering" to describe the ideal state of spiritual freedom. One of the film's protagonists, nineteen-year-old Bin Bin, is enamored of a cartoon version of the Monkey King from the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West* (Xiyou ji)--an embodiment of a similar ideal combination of empowerment, freedom, and enjoyment. (104)

Ironically, while these characters are allowed to wander amongst the dilapidated buildings and construction sites of Datong, I would argue they lack all three characteristics of the Monkey King: empowerment, freedom, and enjoyment. These attributes are characteristic of individuals who have the power to determine their course in life, and are completely lacking from the film's three main protagonists: Bin Bin, Xiao Ji, and Qiao Qiao. At times, the characters even quote the Monkey King, but it only contributes to widening the gap between the fictional Monkey King's achieved freedom, and the aimless wandering of the three protagonists. Even when Bin Bin tries to purposefully shape his own future by joining the military, he is refused due to a health condition. Xiao Ji, who pursues Qiao Qiao romantically, is thwarted in his efforts by local thug Qiao San. Speaking of several scenes where a particular physical action is repeated for 10-15 iterations, such as Qiao Qiao pushing her 'boyfriend' Qiao San in their tour bus, Jia states in an interview that these repetitive moments are a "reminder to the characters that they are actually existing" (Jia 2002). In other words, these protagonists lack agency to such a degree that their basic understanding of their own existence seems to fade from view. For the filmgoer, this much is clear from the wandering and directionless nature of the film, but repetition or stuttering is also a key

feature of Deleuze's seer-characters, because such reiterations reveal the sensory-motor break whereby these characters no longer know how to act and actions stop making causal sense. As I argue of Jia's films at large, in relation to the act of witnessing in his films, “this is the cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent” (Deleuze 1989). In the midst of Datong's rapid modernization, lack of agency relegates Jia's characters to the position of the witness, where they are more able to see what is intolerable about the transitions depicted in the film.

Ultimately, *Unknown Pleasures* is pessimistic in its outlook for the generation of youths growing up during this urbanization and transition of economies. The film presents the intolerable *as* the day to day lived experience of these individuals. In the end of the film, Xiao Ji and Bin Bin decide to take radical action by robbing a bank. Tonglin Lu locates the locus of this idea in American pop culture, or *Pulp Fiction* more specifically (Lu 2006, 136). In these films, the characters see an American ideology associated with clear sensory-motor schemata embellished by characters that 'take action' regardless of consequences. Their attempted robbery fails, however, with Xiao Ji fleeing on his motorcycle and Bin Bin being taken to jail by the police. Although Bin Bin perhaps pays the heftier price, Xiao Ji's retreat is more emblematic of the film in general. While riding back towards Datong on a mostly empty highway in the middle of nowhere, Xiao Ji's bike breaks down. He slowly rolls to a stop, and is left in an even bleaker setting than where he began, with even less mobility. Eventually, he hitches a ride, but the message seems clear: he can't get anywhere on his own. Bin Bin, on the other hand, is asked to stand and sing in the police station. He sings *Ren Xiao Yao*, the popular song

about 'carefree wandering' described earlier. The fact that he sings this while imprisoned reinforces the irony of this song as a theme song for the generation of youths followed in the film. Again, the desire for freedom, empowerment, and enjoyment is juxtaposed with the actual realities of these urban youths. While Deleuze's discussion of 'the intolerable' leaves this term vague as to what would actually constitute this disturbance of reality, *Unknown Pleasures* builds on a concrete concept of the intolerable in the lives of the 'Birth Control Generation' and drives home this intolerability in the final moments of the film. For a viewer who identifies with the film as a resident of Datong or a similar city, or identifies as part of the generation depicted in the film, the lack of possibility and opportunity for these individuals on screen and their real life correlates is intolerable. In the film, Xiao Ji and Bin Bin's decision to rob a bank is their final attempt to reestablish a sensory-motor schema, though an immoral one, through which they might make sense of their lives and perceive some sort of movement or purposefulness. Better to be bank robbers than to not exist at all, Jia's commentary suggests. Ultimately, they fail in this regard as well as their plan is founded on an imaginary American ideology perpetrated through the spread of popular culture globally.

While seemingly less political that *Xiao Wu*, *Unknown Pleasures* works as a modern political film by communicating the intolerable experience of urban youths who are forgotten by the PRC's rapid transformations, even as they have greater access to global media. This global media only offers hollow ideologies, similar to the problematic construction of the proper 'business man' in *Xiao Wu*. Rather than didactically suggesting a revolutionary solution, however, *Unknown Pleasures* pushes spectators

towards a becoming-seer, where they might recognize something intolerable in their own lives. As Reid argues, this recognition allows the possibility of real change in the lives of the spectators who view these films. Although *Unknown Pleasures* is pessimistic, its pessimism becomes a device to mobilize subjective formations of perception and affect so that the individual viewer may encounter the intolerable, whereas previously the intolerable was subsumed under a conception of *normal* life. *Unknown Pleasures* frames recognition of the intolerable in terms of personal, existential experiences, but they are simultaneously collective and collapse distinction between this private, existential register and public concerns regarding the economic liberalization of China and forced modernization as seen in Datong. Jia himself forges this connection when declaring his films different from those of the Fifth Generation Chinese films, which "had nothing to do with the reality of China at the time" (Jia 2008). Jia intends to depict the 'reality' of Datong with his 'realist style', but also the Chinese situation in general in 2001. *Unknown Pleasures* is set just prior to Hu Jintao taking leadership of the PRC, when economists were concerned that "China was developing a social structure not unlike Latin America" where wealth was distributed drastically unevenly, even though – or rather, because – economic reforms were well under way, as illustrated by the constant destruction and construction in *Unknown Pleasures* (Fewsmith 2008, 237). While the urban youth of Datong are subject to a set of personal experiences, these personal experiences are immediately connected to a larger collective experience regarding China's economic situation that Joseph Fewsmith refers to. By constructing a film-text that prompts a becoming-seer by recognizing something intolerable in the daily lived experience of a generation of youth, Jia prompts

the coming of “a newly-built world, a newly-built culture” (Jia 2002). In other words, a people to come composed of urban youths awakened to the intolerable aspects of their experience and subjectively re-situated in a way that they might choose to believe in their ability to change their own worlds.

The Problem of Distribution as the Solution to Distribution

Though I have already touched on issues of distribution within China in terms of Jia's films – such as *Xiao Wu*'s commercial failure, but its success through alternative forms of distribution – I must return to these issues because they are critical to an understanding of Jia's later success and acceptance by the PRC. Although Jia's foray into independent filmmaking with *Xiao Wu,* and also partly its subject matter, led officials to include Jia in a governmental blacklisting of a group of directors most commonly associated with the 'Sixth Generation', it also garnered him international acclaim. The success of many Sixth Generation filmmakers rode upon the distribution of these films as 'Banned in China', proudly proclaimed on releases in the West. Although it is impossible to say whether or not these films would have had the same critical success abroad had they been welcomed by the PRC, their banning certainly enabled marketing schemes of western distributors and piqued the interest of western film critics. The PRC's eventual acceptance of Jia and other Sixth Generation filmmakers prompts further question into why this eventual acceptance occurred. Was it because the filmmakers stopped their political efforts, and anesthetized their films so that they could make a profit with audiences at home, what Sheila Cornelius calls “the taming effect of commercialism” (Cornelius 2002, 108)? Or did the PRC see a growing voice in these directors, one they needed to co-opt lest it grow more popular and more

critical? These questions echo Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's work on the Culture Industry, an eventual symptom, the Frankfurt School thought, of capitalism. With increasing market reforms, the PRC's cultural arm may increasingly resemble the Culture Industry, but with this resemblance comes the Culture Industry's weakness to minor forms of textual production and critique.

The initial venture of Sixth Generation Chinese filmmakers into global markets predated the success of Fifth Generation epics such as *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), albeit in the less popular festival circuits and networks of distribution, and emerged mainly as a response to the filmmaking environment in China at the time. As a relative latecomer to the Sixth Generation filmmaking scene, Jia learned from the experience of comrades such as Wang Xiaoshuai and Zhang Yuan who both entered state-run studios after graduating from the Beijing Film Academy. Both Wang and Zhang encountered frustration in these positions, as their time at the Beijing Film Academy did ensure them positions at studios, but did not ensure them positions where they would have the capacity to direct or create their own films. Not only did all production go through the state run industries at the time, but, to their apparent dismay, there existed a hierarchical system of notoriety that one would have to work their way up before being allowed to create a film. Since these directors eschewed the state run system of production and distribution, however, they were also required to find alternative methods of distributing their films. The biggest alternative market for these directors, and most immediately successful as awards show, was the global film festival market.

As I mentioned previously, Sixth Generation films in general, and Jia's films in particular, have been criticized as self-orientalizing as a process of their globalization – or pandering to international crowds, as more severe critics would argue. Speaking of Jia in particular, Tonglin Lu complicates this straight correlation between accessing global markets and self-orientalizing:

> Instead of praising the new world order, [Sixth Generation films] often question the process that has given birth to their own production and question the value system that has formed the basis of their existence – the capitalist mode of production – by portraying the "localized" lifestyle of an underprivileged urban population. In their documentary or documentary-like portrayals of ordinary Chinese urbanites, they debunk the myth of China as a success story of globalization, a myth disseminated by both the official media in China and the "free press" in the West in order to advance the interests of both the Communist state and multinational corporations. (Lu 2006, 124)

There are two important points to consider in this assessment: First, the films are depicting actual realities predicted by economists where globalized economies encounter 'a structure not unlike Latin America' where wealth is concentrated in smaller pockets, and peoples are 'localized' or trapped despite globalization's promise of mobility. Second, the charge against these directors of self-orientalizing may be perpetrated by the state itself through a nationalist impulse as official ideology, when the depiction of people in documentary fashion reinforces impressions of China's differences only incidentally in examining real life conditions. In other words, the depiction is realistic, but Chinese officials do not want these realities to circulate globally – a reason censorship is often applied in Iran as well. Whereas critics seem to be locating the presentation of difference as a tactic on the part of Sixth Generation filmmakers, the depictions of these filmmakers are realistically documenting the

consequences of increasing, often disruptive globalization. Furthermore, in Jia's films at least, globalization plays a constant role in the existential experiences of the characters, lending evidence to his insight in this direction. In *Xiao Wu*, Xiao Yong presents an example of the globalizing elite as he sells cigarettes abroad; Xiao Wu, on the other hand, is part of the population that is further localized by Xiao Yong's business. In *Unknown Pleasures* the protagonists appear to be fashionable purveyors of pop culture, but it turns out their upwardly mobile appearance is betrayed by their lack of opportunities. All of these characters, Xiao Wu and the protagonists of *Unknown Pleasures*, act in the position of the seer as they bear witness to global market politics and the (re)distribution of biopower as markets shift to reflect China's globalization.[6]

Rather than a sellout to the global marketplace, as his critics would have it, I argue that Jia presents a critical account of how globalization affects people at home within China. It is the case that Jia could both sell out to the global market and simultaneously critique the same process of globalization he participates in, but since making his film *The World* (2004) he has not only returned to making state sponsored films in China, but has maintained critical success abroad while also accessing markets at home. While this may also be seen as 'selling out' to the state and denouncing his roots as an independent filmmaker, Jia is very vocal about his intentions for returning to filmmaking with the state's consent. Firstly, Jia has stated that it is very important to him that his banned films are distributed via VCD on the black market, despite the fact that he receives no monetary compensation for the sales of these VCDs (Jia 2008). This can only mean that

[6] David Martin-Jones notices a similar trend in *Police Story* (1985) in *Deleuze and World Cinemas*, albeit without the focus on the localized populations. As the film is from 15 years earlier, the specific populations I address here had not quite emerged yet.

Jia is interested primarily in communicating to spectators and widening the distribution of his films through VCD sales, rather than making a profit off of them. In terms of his entering the 'mainstream', Jia “insists he is motivated by access to audience, not money” (Pickowicz 2006, 4). If not for profit, the director's focus is his art, or its social and political impact. Secondly, though his films after *The World* in 2004 have all been made with state consent, they still maintain, I argue, the same critical edge as his earlier, banned films. Pickowicz uses the metaphor of 'dancing' to describe the way that underground filmmakers have to gracefully negotiate regulations in the content of their films, which is useful in understanding how filmmakers are able to maintain the critical edge of their films (6). As a result, Jia's maneuvering of the state's regulations of the filmmaking situation in China shows that he isn't selling out the way that one would traditionally phrase it – for monetary gain – but he is 'selling out' to secure better access to the audiences that might be politically affected by his films.

I will now turn to the first film Jia made with state approval, *The World*, which focuses explicitly on the effects of globalization. *The World* examines a cross section of people working at the Beijing World Park 'in their social milieu', a theme-park style attraction that claims to allow a tour of the world without leaving Beijing. The park itself exists as a material, almost farcical example of globalization, but the film also investigates the *localization* in Beijing as populations congregate in Beijing for work – what Dudley Andrew has called the “mismatch of provincial and urban experience” in this film (Andrew 2010, 84). *The World* exposes the effects of globalization by 'bearing witness' to how it affects particular areas and peoples. In examining these effects, *The World* also

expose something *intolerable* about global market politics. As a result, I argue, beyond what Andrew notes, that *The World* mobilizes spectators into a becoming-seer, like *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasures,* which allows spectators to recognize the intolerable facets in their own lives. In doing so, these films have the power to reinforce what Deleuze calls a 'belief in the world' and 'one's power to change it'. By showing that Jia's later films work politically in the same fashion as his earlier films, I also show that Jia's consistency proves that he has not 'sold out' commercially, but more importantly that he has not succumbed to the 'taming effect' associated with directors who return to state-approved filmmaking – or, that he has not been sublimated by the majoritarian market forces of the Culture Industry.

The World **in Private: Global Movement, Personal Trauma**

Jia's *The World* marks the director's entry into officially approved filmmaking in China. As a film that discusses the effects of globalization, however, *The World* follows the critical trajectory of Jia's earlier films. In both content and form, *The World* addresses globalization with its global funding, transnational actors, and depiction of global locales (for more on the funding, see Andrew 2010, 83). Set in the Beijing World Park, where one can 'visit the world without leaving Beijing', characters walk between Egypt and London almost seamlessly, implying an underlying global connection. Not just a hoax of mise-en-scene, global actors come from other countries to work at the Beijing World Park, constituting a global movement accentuated by legal and language barriers. While the film received exhibition and attention in China due to it being accepted by PRC officials, the film was even more well received internationally by critics and on the festival circuit, even receiving exhibition in theaters abroad. Due to these features, *The*

World focuses even more consciously on globalization than Jia's earlier films. This presents an interesting question: can Jia maintain a critique of globalization in this film, while the film itself operates *as* a product of globalization? I argue that Jia maintains a political edge by focusing on the *localization* that takes place as part of globalization, and despite the fact that it seems like a globalized product, the stories actually focus on local concerns: in particular, the movement of migrant workers to Beijing and the effects of globalization on the economy in Beijing. As a result, Jia forces the ideology of global capitalism to stutter in revealing the fragmentation of classes, between urban and rural, wealthy and poor, local and global. The people to come revealed by *The World* as a modern political film is more a revelation of the stratification of classes due to increasing globalization than a revelation about a particular population as in *Unknown Pleasures*. *The World* reveals this inequality to be intolerable through the dichotomy established between workers at the Beijing World Park and the peripheral characters they come into contact with, which exposes the difference between perceived benefits of globalization and its felt affects.

Although there are many characters the film tracks throughout, *The World* mainly centers on a performer at the Beijing World Park, Tao, and security guard, Taisheng, who are in a relationship from the beginning. The story itself meanders – there are several plots that are picked up and put down variously – but key characters also include migrant workers from Shanxi and performers from Russia who have come to work at the Beijing World Park. Two important peripheral characters from these populations are Little Sister, Taisheng's childhood friend who comes to Beijing from a rural area looking

for work, and Anna, a Russian performer who quickly becomes trapped in Beijing and is forced to sell her body. While Tao and Taisheng make up the bulk of the narrative, and have an almost amiable experience with globalization, Little Sister and Anna illustrate a darker side of globalization and the seemingly fluid movement of peoples in the name of profit or to make a living, for the people who orchestrate these movements and the workers themselves respectively. The clear demarcation between the experiences of each of these sets, however, gives a clear example of the inequality at play: Tao and Taisheng's experiences are far different from Anna and Little Sister's. Ultimately, like Jia's other films, *The World* is about the quotidian lives of its protagonists, even if these protagonists are slightly more glamorous in the case of the performers, but the 'quotidian' in the case of Tao and Taisheng is vastly different from the 'quotidian' of Anna and Little Sister. Whereas Tao and Taisheng's daily work seems comfortable, Anna and Little Sister's work and lives in Beijing are eventually revealed to be downward spirals that leave them in positions they cannot escape from. While the bulk of Tao and Taisheng's experiences revolve around their romances, Anna and Little Sister's experiences have a greater deal of urgency and seem more elemental. And while this may show the unequal distribution of wealth previously mentioned as a concern of economic analysts, it certainly shows the more immediate problem in the daily lives of individuals of 'localization' and the 'trapped freedom' Tonglin Lu argues is a part of *Unknown Pleasures*, Jia's earlier work.

Whereas the characters in *Unknown Pleasures* often quote pop culture to illustrate the location and production of their desires, *The World* uses formal breakage in the form of

cartoon-vignettes that interrupt the narrative periodically. Often, these vignettes show important communications via text messages between the characters, illustrating moments or turns in their relationships with one another. At other times, they draw on the fantasies of the characters, as in the scene used for the cover of the Zeitgeist release of the DVD that has an airline hostess soaring through the skies without the plane that determines or delineates which destination she will arrive at. These vignettes are key moments in the narrative, because they illustrate the points at which the narrative breaks down as they form an 'interstice' between the normal film-images. As Deleuze argues, the interstice between images is where film-thought occurs, where the logical conjunction of a set makes meaning. Although these are not proper interstices, as they constitute images in their own right, they operate in a similar fashion in *The World* by marking moments where the film poses a statement to the viewer in the form of a mental image. As I will show, the vignette with the flying stewardess is key to understanding *The World*, because, despite the film's insistence on globalization and its status as a global product, its message is not one of freedom and free movement, but of trapped individuals and their localization. The image of the flying stewardess, in turn, takes on a sad irony – her desire for the freedom of magical flight and the ability to choose her movements herself is juxtaposed with the real life stasis of the individuals. Similarly, as Taisheng takes his visitors from Shanxi on a tour through the Beijing World Park, he beams at the fact that they can move from Cairo to London seemingly instantaneously. While his happiness at showing his friends from the 'backward' Shanxi this 'global movement' communicates his belief in achieving a semblance of freedom, Taisheng in the narrative, and viewers of the film, rarely leave the park at all. As a

result, Jia's comment on globalization oscillates between these poles of freedom and entrapment, or more specifically 'perceived' freedom and 'actual' entrapment.

Francoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih's work on 'minor transnationalism' informs my understanding of the oscillation between perceived freedom and actual entrapment through two forms of transnationalism they discuss: transnationalism from above and transnationalism from below. Transnationalism from above is “associated with the utopic views of globalization, which celebrate the overcoming of national and other boundaries for the constitution of a liberal global market, the hybridization of cultures, and the expansion of democracies and universal human rights” (Lionnet and Shih 2005, 6). This 'utopic view' haunts the theme park setting of The World, and animates the characters' attitudes throughout the film as they go about their daily work as performers. Eventually, we learn as viewers that their lives are more complicated than their performances makes them out to be at a first glance, but the Beijing World Park itself thrives on this concept of 'overcoming national boundaries' and creating a seeming 'hybridization of cultures'. Later, the film confronts this concept of hybridization with seemingly insurmountable barriers in the form of language barriers and even geopolitical barriers. Anna's only friendship amongst her new colleagues at the Beijing World Park is with Tao. While they clearly consider each other friends in the way they meet one-on-one for a meal and express themselves to each other, both through their gestures and by revealing very personal details, ultimately neither of them understands what the other is saying. Although they often understand basic sentiments, such as when Anna breaks down and begins to cry, they never truly communicate, because this

'hybridization' encouraged by globalized capitalism does not require cultural or personal communication in order to function. In fact, it seems that such communication might pose a risk to business, considering Anna *tries* to express her entrapment to Tao, as well as the fact that she is considering prostituting herself as the only way she can think of to 'free' herself from Beijing, who might have been able to help her leave the city. Similarly, Little Brother comes to Beijing knowing Taisheng's success. While his movement is not properly transnational, his move from 'the country' to Beijing shares many characteristics of Anna's transnational movement. It is clear that he enters an entirely other context from his different dialect to the way he is treated even by those from Shanxi who have assimilated. The only work for migrant laborers, however, is the dangerous work, such as construction of new skyscrapers. The work is dangerous, it is implied, because migrant laborers are hired and there is little concern for their safety. The lack of work Little Brother discovers belies this utopic view of the movement of peoples, and instead contributes to what seem to be human rights violations – or, if not violations, as close as the construction businesses can get to violations. The film enforces this argument when Little Brother dies in a construction accident. It turns out that he had been working extra shifts in order to make ends meet, including working dangerous night hours. What these examples amount to is something like transnationalism from below, "the sum of the counterhegemonic operations of the nonelite who refuse assimilation to one given nation-state, including 'everyday practices of ordinary people'" (6). What is notable about these examples from *The World*, however, is that Anna and Little Brother do not refuse assimilation or the 'everyday practices of ordinary people' of their position. Instead they seem to take on the roles that

fit the status quo of migrant laborers. The 'people to come', in this instance, is the revelation that there *is* a people, as Deleuze would put it: “The moment the master, or the colonizer, proclaims 'There have never been people here', the missing people are a becoming, they invent themselves, in shanty towns and camps, or in ghettos, in new conditions of struggle to which a necessarily political art must contribute” (Deleuze 1989, 217). *The World* contributes to this political project in the way Lionnet and Shih suggest by giving grisly examples of the fates of those who are prodded into these positions. As a result, while the film oscillates between freedom and entrapment, it also oscillates between these utopic views and dystopic views of transnationlism and globalization, which reveal a class of people produced by these global flows.

Although there seems to be a movement between two poles in this film, establishing a dichotomy between a utopic, free view of globalization and dystopic entrapment, I use Lionnet and Shih's analysis to point out the falsity of drawing such a distinction in *The World*. They argue that “By extracting the site of resistance and defining it as transnationalism from below, it appears that there are two different transnationalisms in opposition and conflict, when in reality the minor and the major participate in one shared transnational moment and space structured by uneven power relations” (7). In other words, Lionnet and Shih point out that theorizing a continuum with two extremes is the approach of classical politics, as defined earlier in this project. It posits a dominant force and a resistant force caught up in a dialectical or revolutionary moment; or, in the case of *The World*, an understanding of globalization that glorifies its practices and one that demonizes them. Lionnet and Shih understand globalization, instead, as a

single process whereby both of these positions are established simultaneously. In defining a *minor transnationalism*, they situate these dichotomies as the first points where minor/minority subjects challenge traditional understandings of globalization. If we are to call *The World* a modern political film, that would be to say that it recognizes this simultaneity of movement, or the complex flows of capitalism, which are not easy to trace in determining their effects. I argue that *The World* follows through with Lionnet and Shih's assessment, by positing the alienating effects of globalization that ultimately lead the film to its conclusion. This realization is bound up in two moments in the film, which are sites of trauma for Tao and Taisheng in that they reveal the previously hidden effects of globalization and connect these effects to their immediate, personal lives. As is the case with most modern political films, these scenes connect global, overarching politics to the private lives of individuals and therefore collapse any notion of separation between a public and private. This film pushes this facet of modern political films further, however, by also collapsing distinction between the national and global socio-economic currents.

The World compounds the quotidian lives of its protagonists with a revelatory moment of trauma in each of the protagonist's lives. In the case of Taisheng, the death of Little Brother reminds him of his own movement from Shanxi to Beijing in search of work. Whereas Taisheng was relatively sheltered from the hardships of this movement in securing a stable, safe job at the Beijing World Park, his childhood friend's experience presents an alternative reading of this movement. Tao's intimate relationship with Anna despite the language barrier that keeps them from communicating particular ideas is

based upon their similar positions as performers at the Beijing World Park. In this manner, they almost mirror each other, except for the fact that Tao is Chinese and Anna is Russian. Their difference is also articulated in the eventual trajectory of their careers. Tao is a lead performer at the Beijing World Park, and she, like Taisheng, seems to enjoy a degree of job security and enjoyment. Tao's experience is unlike Anna's, who is taken advantage of in that her 'handler' keeps her passport so that she cannot leave the country, and she does not make enough money even to visit her sister in another city. Though they are similar in many respects, ultimately Anna is a victim of what almost seems to be human trafficking under the auspices of globalization. In this way, Tao and Taisheng's personal lives are intimately connected with these global politics, which become intolerable for each of them. Both of these events lead to a general decline in the mood of the film, which starts out energetic and lighthearted. By the end of the film, after another block in their relationship in the form of Qun, a woman Taisheng desires, their relationship seems to have dissolved and they both die due to an apartment gas leak reminiscent of *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1979). While this seems like an overly pessimistic moment in the film, the film ends with two lines of dialogue. After the screen fades to black, Taisheng asks, “Are we dead?” Tao replies, “No, this is only the beginning”. This ending, at odds with the moments that lead up to it, suggests a forward looking stance. The only way to reconcile this stance with this ending is to consider their deaths and their respective traumas encountered in the film as a motivator for audiences who view this film. It is not insignificant that this was Jia's first film to receive a widespread release in China, and as such a product, it seems to say: learn from these examples and know that globalization and the new reforms in China affect you

and your personal lives intimately, even if it is not immediately apparent. In doing so, the film fragments the idea of a uniform Chinese people and reveals the various classes that reside within a seemingly prosperous city such as Beijing, a 'people to come' that are already there, even if hidden by due to their own marginal positions as migrant laborers.

The Cinema, the Seer, the Modern Politics of Recognition

In an interview with Scott Foundas, Jia describes a label he found on his films that were being illegally distributed on VCD in Beijing. The label reads as a sort of manifesto: “It is our duty to distribute these films to the people” (Jia 2008). Though this anecdote edges on the terrain of a classical politics, a rallying cry reminiscent of *Battle of Algiers* Communiqués, it illustrates the way in which these films are revealing something significant about contemporary China. Those who posted this label on these illegally distributed VCDs believe that there is something contained in them valuable enough to inspire a *duty* to their country and their fellow Chinese in the process of watching these films. I have argued that this inspiration comes from Jia's critique of globalization, economic reforms, and the general trend of taking up consumer-capitalism in China. It is impossible to say if this is the same inspiration these distributors of Jia's VCDs found in the films, but these topics are certainly relevant to modern day China. Furthermore, it is a critique that Jia has been able to implement both independently in the case of *Xiao Wu* and *Unknown Pleasures*, but also with state permission in *The World* and *24 City.* Though I believe the methods Jia uses in all of these films – pre-hodological narrative and Post-Socialist Realist Time, the existential and quotidian experiences of characters, and the presence of seers serving the function of bearing witness – are functions of

minor films, the latter two cases are particular interesting in the way that they skirt state censorship. The PRC authorities must recognize that Jia's growing popularity is potentially dangerous if Jia decides to become overtly political. At the same time, Jia knows that catering to the PRC will allow him to more easily work with state censorship and obtain wider distribution at home. As a result, Jia's savvy lies in the way that he co-opts major avenues of film production in order to make minor products. Despite charges of Jia 'selling out' or being co-opted by the state, thinking in terms of the minor or modern political films allows one to reverse this understanding: it is not Jia who is co-opted, but Jia who is co-opting. For marginal subject positions – in China, those critical of the PRC's reforms – such a cinema allows political critique to enter the public sphere, and approach these political ideas on registers other than the purely political – the private, the existential, and the cultural. Jia's style of film enables a political discussion without attempting revolution.

The critique of each film I've discussed in this chapter operates differently. In *Xiao Wu*, Jia constructs dichotomies between the supposed 'evil', the petty thieves of Fenyang, and a more pervasive evil, global entrepreneurs peddling cigarettes and prostitutes. This relationship between the 'localized' and a global elite will similarly be taken up in the next chapter with regards to immigration in the United States. In *Unknown Pleasures*, characters wander aimlessly, realizing their own futility and purposelessness in the face of their pop-culture icons. When the two protagonists try to take action, breaking free from their lack of sensory-motor schemata and enter into a sensory-motor scenario like in the American films they watch, one is arrested and the other is stranded on a sparsely

populated highway. In *The World*, Jia uses globalization as a trope that operates on several registers. Of most concern are the characters who are spurred into global movement for economic reasons, the populations most susceptible to being taken advantage of by the global market. These migrant peoples face tragedy at every step, which the more successful characters must bear witness to as they become seers towards the plight of their friends. In turn, these seers communicate these social problems to audiences, who may be in a fairly stable positions themselves and unaware of the problems created by globalization. Though I was unable to discuss the film here, in *24 City*, Jia constructs a narrative arc that both dramatizes and reveals the effects of economic reforms on specific individuals. The backdrop of all of these films underlies the pooling of wealth amongst a small population who grow rich in China as a result of these reforms. As a mass medium, film has the potential to reach out to a large portion of the population to deliver Jia's subtle critiques of PRC policy. Additionally, film does so affectively or emotionally, shifting subject-positions in this first instance, which acts as political mobilization in a later instance. In 'feeling for' Xiao Wu, Bin Bin, Anna, or Su Na there is a mutual becoming-seer of character on screen and the audience members that view these films.

Ramin Bahrani's Fragmented Dreams: Contemporary American Realist Cinema and the Broken Cliché

In this final chapter, I return to the United States where the World Trade Organization protests and Occupy Wall Street movements originated. The United States as source of these movements is not surprising, considering the critical disjunction between portrayals of opportunity in the United States and the reality its citizens face. Since coined by James Truslow Adams in 1931, the 'American Dream' has been used as a term for the opportunities in the United States and the cultural expectations of its citizens, although this is a cultural discourse that has existed since the birth of the nation. This coinage has become ideology as it plays out in cultural products such as film and television and other social fields, such as politics, setting expectations for citizens and immigrants traveling to the United States. Films from *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) to *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) have used the American Dream as their main motif, perpetuating the idea as an accurate portrayal of reality. This latter film's 'happy ending' and emotional impact depends upon the success of the American Dream and its ability to elevate an individual beyond difficult economic circumstances if they just 'work hard enough'. As part of this process, however, *The Pursuit of Happyness* shows spectators that one needs to fit the role, take on the proper worldview, and in this way become the 'correct' subject to obtain this success. As a result, I argue *The Pursuit of Happyness* does not suggest that people can succeed if they just work hard enough, as most interpret this ideal, but that one succeeds by conforming to a particular class. In this chapter, I examine the way modern political films integrate the American Dream in a more critical manner than *The Pursuit of Happyness*. In particular, I look to the films of Iranian-American filmmaker Ramin Bahrani, because of the way his films expose the

American Dream as what Deleuze would call a cliché: an unquestioned ideology that prevents a belief in the world and the creative power of change.

I begin this chapter by laying out a definition of the American Dream in more detail, and illustrating how it serves as an ideological backdrop in *The Pursuit of Happyness*. As a celebration of the American Dream, this film provides a useful example of how this particular ideology is mobilized in film, and how it affects the presentation of cinematic subjectivities. While I addressed the movement from a disciplinary society to a society of control in my introduction, *The Pursuit of Happyness* serves as a fitting example of why individuation still occurs post-disciplinary society. As Steven Shaviro notes in relation to this shift:

> Workers are still being exploited... regardless of how this process is described. But this does not mean that neoliberal dogma is simply mystification, or ideology. Rather, we should see the theoretical shifts dissected by Foucault as performative utterances. The expression of such theories is a particular sort of *action*, which is coordinated with other kinds of political, social, and economic actions. (Shaviro 2011, 78)

The Pursuit of Happyness, and its explicit operation according to a neoliberal economic paradigm constitutes this performative utterance, as its formal mechanisms and narrative operates on viewers, perpetuating an actual *lived* way of being in the world based on this economic paradigm. While the film itself is perhaps not a form of regulatory biopower, I argue that its focus on proper subjects makes it at least biopolitical in promoting an ideology that regulates biopower. In fact, while *The Pursuit of Happyness* addresses similar economic paradigms to the films of Jia in the last chapter, no censorship is involved, because this is an economic paradigm and accompanying ideology 'at home' in the United States.

I then turn to films that belong to what I call Contemporary American Realist Cinema, which critique glamorous notions of the American Dream through their insistence on a quotidian type of realism, and rupture mainstream cinematic time through a deliberate insistence on blue collar and immigrant labor. A circuitous narrative structure accompanies this focus on labor in Bahrani's films, which reveals the endless, risk-laden nature of these types of work in the United States, unlike *The Pursuit of Happyness*, which assumes eventual success. Considering the economic hardships of the late 2000's, film critic A.O. Scott has questioned the efficacy of Hollywood as something that can contribute towards productive positions in the recessionary culture, where the American Dream may no longer be a viable life goal. Bahrani's films respond to this question directly by revealing the American Dream as a broken cliché. While this may not sound very productive, I argue that Bahrani's critique of the American Dream result in the production of immanent-seers, who reinvest themselves with the world once they are able to break away from the regulatory function the American Dream wields as biopower. These films construct a new, more sustainable subject, as a result, marked by their belief in the world. Bahrani's films fundamentally differ from *The Pursuit of Happyness* in avoiding this latter film's construction of a sensory-motor schemata that unequivocally links hard work to success.

Nation, Immigration, and the American Dream

To understand how I situate Bahrani's films as modern political films, I will first address what functions as the majoritarian ideology within the context of the films I examine in this chapter: namely, the American Dream. Understanding the relation of the American

Dream to the films I address here is important to the political function of the films themselves, because the Dream has taken on a biopolitical dimension in structuring the way people live and work in the United States, an explicit component of the films I discuss in this chapter. To give a brief history, the ideology of the American Dream has its roots in the Declaration of Independence, which American colonies used to declare independence from the British Empire in 1776. The second sentence of this document begins, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness". Since this declaration, these 'unalienable rights' have remained a part of the political discourse in the United States, being articulated to suit different ends. In time, the pursuit of happiness has taken on more specificity, becoming the American Dream, which is often referred to light-heartedly as ownership of a 'white-picket fence and 2.5 kids' – in other words: home ownership and the nuclear family. While this may not be what James Truslow Adams meant when he first used the phrase in the *Epic of America*, polling published in 2009 shows that the American Dream has come to mean a very specific attitude towards work and success. While polling may not be an entirely accurate science, nor a gauge of what all citizens of the United States think, the positions revealed by polling are meant to be a more direct (sampling of the population) correlate of the attitudes found in popular media and politics. These attitudes towards work and success can be articulated as the belief that one can achieve success if they 'just work hard enough' and that success is achievable by anyone, rather than privileging a singular biopolitical construct.

Adams coined the phrase American Dream by writing an almost manifesto-like epilogue to his work of American history, *The Epic of America* (1931). This work seems to be largely forgotten by those who use the term today, as it contains a critical attitude not found in the modern discourse on the American Dream, which many believe is a dream of material success (32% of over 3000 polled in 2001; Zogby 2010, 572). At times, Adams even seems to directly critique our modern take on this American ideology. He, for example, stands out as an anti-capitalist thinker at points, arguing of the worker in relation to rising wages:

> He is warned that if he does not consume to the limit, instead of indulging in pleasures which do not cost money, he may be deprived not only of his high wages but of any at all. He, like the rest of us, thus appears to be getting into a treadmill in which he earns, not that he may enjoy, but that he may spend, in order that the owners of the factories may grow richer. (Adams 1935, 418)

Later, he critiques risky investment banking – likely thinking of the Great Depression, although he does not name it – important for our consideration of *The Pursuit of Happyness*, which ties investment banking to the American Dream. Instead of the modern takes on the Dream, there are two driving concerns for Adams's articulation: first, the key difference between America and Europe as a question of class; second, the construction of a public that holds certain values in common, which reads like a move towards Multitude, if not quite achieving this distinction.

As a historian who considers America's independence from Europe in his historical work, it is not surprising that the difference between America and Europe is key for this thinker's conception of American ideology. Adams frames this as a class issue, and within this as a question of opportunity. He gives several anecdotes throughout his

epilogue to *The Epic of America* about European immigrants coming to America and being amazed at the potential afforded them. This potential is not just material: one of these anecdotes details the story of someone who 'worked for' Adams, presumably a laborer, but who Adams would have stimulating intellectual conversations with after the day's work was complete. The laborer lamented that back in Europe he would perhaps be given a few kind words after work, but nothing like the real engagement Adams offered. Adams interprets this as an example of how each society handles class:

> the American dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (Adams 415)

The focus on societal differences marks America as a unique bastion of opportunity in the world. Whether or not this is true, this key part of the discourse remains today, and is useful in understanding why the American Dream is so often a dream of immigration. As part of this, however, it is also a dream of class mobility, for both immigrants and United States nationals. This passage, which seems to be the most oft quoted, is the key passage that translates today to the belief that one can achieve class mobility if they 'just work hard enough'. As a result, this part of Adams's text holds the most verisimilitude with today's American ideology.

Later, however, Adams begins to move in the direction of Multitude as part of his class critique. While shared values amongst a people alone do not constitute the Multitude, a

very racist group of people likely has shared values for example, Adams actually articulates this concept of shared values amongst a society of diverse individuals. This begins as a critique of the attempts of corporations and government to lead the people:

> We can look neither to the government nor to the heads of the great corporations to guide us into the paths of a satisfying and humane existence as a great nation unless we, as multitudinous individuals, develop some greatness in our own individual souls. Until countless men and women have decided in their own hearts, through experience and perhaps disillusion, what is a genuinely satisfying life. (426-427)

He uses the Library of Congress, which he greatly admires, as a case study for what this should look like:

> As one looks down on the general reading room, which alone contains ten thousand volumes which may be read without even the asking, one sees the seats filled with silent readers, old and young, rich and poor, black and white, the executive and the laborer, the general and the private, the noted scholar and the schoolboy, all reading at their own library provided by their own democracy. It has always seemed to me to be a perfect working out in a concrete example of the American dream – the means provided by the accumulated resources of the people themselves, a public intelligent enough to use them, and men of high distinction, themselves a part of the great democracy, devoting themselves to the good of the whole, uncloistered. (426)

What is notable about this example is not just that a diverse population is making use of the resource that is the Library of Congress, but that this resource has been constructed by and perpetuated through this diverse population. What this reveals about Adams's original conception of the American Dream is that it was less a meditation on opportunity, material goods, and property as it is often discussed today, and more a meditation on the biopolitical destratification of the Multitude, and its ability to 'declare independence' from previous systems of value in constructing its own by the people. This side of the American dream has clearly been forgotten in its current incarnation, but I argue certain independent filmmakers from the United States are returning to this

conception of the dream and furthering it through their critical attitudes towards its current deployment. First, however, it will be useful to take a look at what current opinions are of the American Dream, and its relation to issues of race, class, and immigration.

As I argued previously, while Adams may have coined the phrase, current attitudes towards the American Dream are very different from this original articulation. William Clark, who studies the Dream in relation to immigration in the United States, identifies three common elements of the American Dream today: obtaining a reasonable income, secure housing, and political freedom (Clark 2003, 6). For Clark, these values point towards the general idea that today the American Dream, at least for immigrants, is the dream of becoming a part of the middle class in the United States. While he acknowledges that "what makes up the middle-class lifestyle has changed over time", he also admits, "Nevertheless, the combination of an income range and ownership encompasses much that we think of as middle class" (Clark 2003, 8). This resonates with the traditional idea of the American Dream as achieving the 'white picket fence' of the suburban home and the financial stability to raise '2.5 kids'. These values are exampled in the films I look at in this chapter, but I also want to complicate this notion of the American Dream to an extent. The September 2010 issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly* published a series of polls focused on the question of defining the American Dream. In one surprising result, approximately 50% of a sample believed the American Dream to be a spiritual concern to approximately 30% who believed it to be a material concern (with the rest being undecided; Zogby 2010, 572). While surely there are

spiritual aspects of home ownership for the respondents, this seems to suggest that some of Adams's original and non-material concerns persist today in a latent form. 'Spiritual' might also be interpreted as 'religious' concerns, which would require further study, but might link the Dream to a puritanical subject-creating assemblage similar to those of chapters 1 and 2 in this project. Other findings in these polls are not so surprising, however, such as the belief that hard work is overwhelmingly the key to success (GSS 2010, 573; and Pew 2010, 574).

Defining the American Dream as the achievement of a middle class lifestyle in the United States highlights two populations that are the clear recipients of this dream: immigrants to the United States and citizens below the poverty line. As a result, these are the two populations films would logically depict when addressing the American Dream. I will now turn to examples of films that address the Dream directly. I will begin with the *Pursuit of Happyness* as a film that uncritically ascribes to and perpetuates the American Dream both as obtainable and as a material objective, even if masqueraded along with seemingly spiritual concerns. This film is an important example in that most of its emotional impact derives from the wish-fulfillment of the American Dream. As a result, this film operates in accord with what T. Kerr has referred to as the "vast amorphous propaganda machine" that perpetuates beliefs in and the efficacy of the American Dream (Kerr 1996, 74). It also depicts a process in which an African-American rises up from invisibility and homelessness to be recognized as a productive member of society. Crucial to this film is the idea that its protagonist really does just need to work hard enough to transcend the constraints of one's class, race, and

environment. I then turn to the films of Ramin Bahrani who focuses more explicitly on immigrant populations in the United States, fragmenting notions of a homogenous 'American' subject. As works of Contemporary American Realism, Bahrani's films take us closer to Adams's Multitudinous aspirations, and suggest a renewed value in Adams's work for the contemporary period.

The Pursuit of Happyness, The Pursuit of the Same

The Pursuit of Happyness follows the story of the real life Chris Gardner, who lived on the streets for a year with his son while participating in an internship at Dean Witter Reynolds, a stock brokerage firm. Gardner previously worked in the medical industry in a variety of roles, but after talking to a man in a red Ferrari, he decided to make a career change. While better depicted in films such as *The Joneses* (2009), this material motivator is important because it illustrates how this desire for success is the desire for the *same* type of success that is most visible in American society. Due to a failing relationship, Gardner's girlfriend left him, however, and took all of his belongings while he was in jail for unpaid parking tickets. Despite this setback, he succeeded in obtaining and completing a competitive internship with Dean Witter Reynolds, eventually becoming an employee and financially successful. This movement from owning very little to becoming a wealthy individual typifies the perceived potential inherent in the American Dream. Based on Gardner’s story, the film *The Pursuit of Happyness* follows a similar narrative, but embellishes on key points to strengthen the presence of the American Dream as the driving ideology in the film. These embellishments, combined with the formal features of the film, which are used to produce an affective or emotional response from the viewer, make the film a clear example of what Kerr referred to as the

propaganda machine that perpetuates the American Dream and, as a result, promotes an ideology that operates as regulatory biopower. While it would be difficult to say that all of Hollywood conforms to this model, the way *The Pursuit of Happyness* does so unproblematically hints at its status as majoritarian and cliché – in other words, the film understands the desire to follow this ideology as *natural*. Furthermore, the film takes the individualism inherent in modern concepts of the American Dream to the extreme, contrary to Adams's original vision, through its insistence on conformity and promotion of an ideal subject.

The 'individualist ethos' of *The Pursuit of Happyness* makes it a prime example of Deleuze's action-image, where causal relationships are clear and provide momentum for the narrative. As I have argued previously, action-images also tend to restrict the proliferation of identity or the co-presence of different temporalities, histories, and subjectivities. *The Pursuit of Happyness* takes this a step further by placing the struggle in the hands of Gardner alone, as is custom with Hollywood productions, rather than a numerous but coherent and unified people as in the earlier example of *Battle of Algiers*. As a result, the film operates according to what David Martin-Jones has referred to as "the individualist ethos exemplified by the action-image", which is encased in the "linear continuity of spatialised time" (Martin-Jones 2006, 22). The argument Martin-Jones makes regarding the action-image illustrates an important connection between action-images and modern conceptions of the American Dream. Action-images are based on clear causal connections and agents who have the ability to directly control their circumstances, while the American Dream includes the belief that one can define

their future through their 'hard work', which allows them to create a causal relationship between the present and the future based on their ability to affect their circumstances. This linear relationship between one's agency and potential success typifies attitudes towards 'hard work' in the United States. Two polls included in *Public Opinion Quarterly* addressed questions of agency directly: one poll focused on hard work, showing that in 2007, a year after *The Pursuit of Happyness* was released, 67% of individuals polled for a study believed hard was a prime indicator in 'getting ahead' as opposed to 29% who thought that it was no true indicator (Pew 2010, 574); the other poll focused on the role of luck in getting ahead, revealing that in 2006 68% of individuals polled believed that hard work was more important to luck (with only 11% believing luck was more important; GSS 2010, 573). While these statistics cannot completely define a relatively diffuse concept like the American Dream, they do illustrate a connection between beliefs in the ability to exert one's agency in determining the end results of an action and the American Dream, or, in other words, the ability to establish a linear continuity predicated upon one's ability to determine their environment. In this respect, the qualities that Deleuze sees in the action-image are similar to the qualities deemed part of the modern concept of the American Dream. It is perhaps not surprising, as a result, that so many popular Hollywood films operate according to this 'individualist ethos' or action-image when this is simultaneously a reflection of popular ideologies.

While the individualist ethos of *The Pursuit of Happyness* sets up a clear narrative teleology for the film – the viewer can be fairly certain that Gardner will triumph in the

end – it also sets up linear idea of success. One could argue that success takes many different forms for different people, but *The Pursuit of Happyness* promotes a particular idea of success, which is created by juxtaposing the successful business men with their less successful counterparts, as well as the fact that the impetus of the narrative comes from an encounter with a Ferrari. In terms of the narrative, Gardner is not a character who stutters, but one that struggles and prevails consistently throughout the film despite the numerous setbacks he encounters. His continual achievement in face of setbacks lend to the film's affective nature as it plays with the spectators identification with Gardner and the difficulties he faces, and the eventual joy or relief resulting from his overcoming of these obstacles. Examples of these obstacles include the seemingly crazy man who steals one of his valuable medical imaging devices and the parking tickets that result in the 'booting' of his car. These trials lead Gardner on a linear path, however: he never reflects on the path he has set out on, and its viability or sustainability, but travels perpetually towards financial success. The red Ferrari, the business suit, and the ability to 'blend in' with the white business men who surround the table at Dean Whitter are the consistent goals of the film. Importantly, the business men at Dean Whitter are separated from the more diverse populations in the film that are seen when Gardner is riding the bus or taking his son to daycare. While one could argue that this is either problematic in terms of race and gender, because the men at Dean Whitter are white, or accurate, because successful business people in the 1980's were predominately white men, the film makes clear that there is an elevation of the white businessmen above the rest of the population in terms of Gardner's desire. Following Hardt and Negri, the film may be making a rather complicated argument about class at this point: that it is a

complicated composition comprised of material wealth (even brand consciousness), race, gender, and social hierarchies. Even if this is the case, however, the film is clear about its movement, following the American Dream, from poor to wealthy as the African-American ascends from a realm of diversity to that of a particular socio-economic and racial class. As a result, *The Pursuit of Happyness* privileges a particular identity and subject position as one appropriate to the American Dream, despite Adams's charge that the Library of Congress with its diverse individuals working together exemplified the greatest achievements of the American Dream.

This notion of subjective conformity plays out from the beginning of the film, as illustrated by the film's title with the misspelling of happiness. In the film, Will Smith as Gardner encounters the spelling of happiness with a 'y' on the side of the daycare where he takes his son during the day. The daycare is one of the places we see subjects other than the white business men and the African-American Gardner. The daycare is run by a family of Chinese-Americans, which the film makes a point of by having certain members of the family speak only in Chinese, even as Gardner carries on a conversation in English. In the face of this potential difference, the film opens after its title sequence and inspirational soundtrack with Gardner addressing a man sweeping up outside the daycare: "Excuse me, when is somebody going to clean this up? And the Y, we talked about this, it's an I, in happiness it's an I. There is no Y in happiness". In this scene, the film reifies the greater teleology followed by the film: proper spelling, a clear definition of success, and the assumption of the role of the successful subject (one who has more successfully assimilated than these Chinese-Americans). This differentiation between

subjects carries on throughout the film, such as with the homeless man who becomes the antagonist of a dichotomy between success and non-success. The homeless man is a constant threat to Gardner as he steals his medical imaging machine, but also a reminder of what he might become should he fail at his internship. As a concrete representation of failure in the film, the homeless man further delineates the direction of Gardner's goal by playing upon stereotyped representations of the homeless as crazy (as completely Other). In creating a linear movement where Gardner extricates himself from poverty, the film illustrates the reductive nature of the individualist American Dream despite Gardner's being African-American. His goal not only includes becoming wealthy materially, but also of taking on the position of the successful, which is marked as a specific class in *The Pursuit of Happyness*.

In operating according to the sensory-motor schema in both form and ideology, *The Pursuit of Happyness* presents a notion of the American Dream quite different from its original incarnation in 1931. Most prominently, what was once the dream of the potential for cooperation and opportunities for diverse individuals has become the dream of *transcending* diversity to assume a privileged role in this film. This vertical movement has a clear linear trajectory, which seems to fit popular opinion of what the American Dream has become in the United States. In operating as such, *The Pursuit of Happyness* illustrates the way in which such an ideology might result in the consolidation of an idealized subjectivity. Kerr would no doubt agree, as the purpose of a 'propaganda machine' can only be the spread of ideas, attitudes, and subjectivities benefiting a particular class of people, despite his desire to recreate the American Dream

as a productive force (Kerr 1996). The consolidation of subjectivity is important to understanding the difference between past and present versions of the American Dream in light of its status as appealing to the under-privileged and immigrants, because it achieves something akin to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's 'culture industry' in this regard through mass alienation. The authors explain that the culture industry operates as a distraction through laughter and desire, and as a result alienates people from their own suffering (Adorno 2002, 110). Whereas immigrants and the under-privileged could focus on a more sustainable life style, they put their faith in 'hard work', which may not actually lead to the dreams they aspire to. In fact, the remarkable nature of Chris Gardner's story suggests that more often than not, hard work does not lead to such success. In this respect, the film operates biopolitically in promoting a particular way of life, which takes on a regulatory dimension when considering the more collective ways of living this film eschews. As a film that espouses the virtue of Gardner's hard work and revels in his eventual success, *The Pursuit of Happyness* takes the position of a large cog in Kerr's vast amorphous machine. While it would be difficult to call this a classical political cinema, as with *Battle of Algiers,* it is a film that operates in a completely opposed manner to modern political films with their goals of rupturing majoritarian cinematic regimes, fragmentation, and collective enunciation. While remaining within the context of the United States, and addressing films that consider the American Dream, I will now turn to a set of films from the United States that I argue operate as modern political films through their critique of this majoritarian ideology.

The Broken Cliché and Contemporary American Realist Cinema

In turning to films that begin to critique the ideological function associated with the

American Dream in cinema, I look to what I will call Contemporary American Realist Cinema, which begins to dismantle the ideological drive of the American Dream by presenting it as a broken cliché. I address Contemporary American Realist Cinema, because the discourse surrounding these films returns to questions posed by the culture industry, which I take up in my introduction to this project. As I suggested previously, the culture industry is a useful way to understand Deleuze on cliché and his cinematic politics. Deleuze turns to this problem of cliché when when he asks what happens when the methods of Hitchcock, Eisenstein, and Gance are taken up by mediocre directors. He responds: "When grandeur is no longer that of the composition, but a pure and simple inflation of the represented, there is no cerebral stimulation or birth of thought. It is rather a generalized shortcoming in author and viewers" (Deleuze 1989, 164). Deleuze sees something problematic in the repetition of the same old cinematic clichés, going as far as to say that this "mass-art... has degenerated into state propaganda and manipulation, into a kind of fascism which brought together Hitler and Hollywood, Hollywood and Hitler" (Deleuze 1989, 164). Deleuze's argument borrows from Adorno in drawing a connection between Hitler and Hollywood in how they control the construction of subjects. In this comparison, Deleuze makes a strikingly pro-filmic argument: it isn't just about directors making boring films – as he said in the earlier quote: author *and* viewers – it is about boring films making boring people, or subjects locked into a particular ideology. It is this strict repetition that is intolerable; as Anna Backman Rogers puts it: "It is this exposure of meaninglessness at the heart of supposedly meaningful human activity that is 'intolerable and unbearable'" (Rogers 2011, 4). Contemporary American Realist Cinema critiques the American Dream by

illustrating its status as an ‘intolerable’ and ‘unbearable’ cliché, and by revealing basic realities that pierce the idealism inherent in the American Dream.

The political concern for Deleuze, in relation to the culture industry, becomes how to counter the repetition of clichés, and how to promote a 'belief in the world'. Ronald Bogue argues regarding the intolerable and Deleuze’s belief in the world: “The only viable response to the intolerable is to think differently, to disconnect the world's networks of certainties and pieties and formulate new problems that engender as yet unmapped relations and connections” (Bogue 2010, 122). Bogue’s argument gives insight into what Deleuze really means when he says ‘belief in the world’ – namely, that this belief in the world would be opposed to a belief in cliché, oppressive ideology, or the stories of a dominant/majoritarian power. In other words, Deleuze’s belief in the world is a belief in the immanent or existential possibilities inherent in one’s immediate experience, which makes Contemporary American Realist Cinema an appropriate style to address such issues, which I will return to shortly. Because the question of belief in the world involves breaking away from the reliance on cliché, Bogue suggests that film must construct a line of flight by no longer relying on the usual ways of thinking and the usual subjects of representation – these are certainties and pieties. Offering a potential method of doing so, D.N. Rodowick argues that the answer to Deleuze’s challenge of belief is not through simply formulating new problems by revealing the clichés at work, however, but working through “an anticipatory time—of contingency, the purely conditional, the nondetermined or not yet” (Rodowick 2010, 109). When the action, story, plot, or teleology of a film break down, Rodowick explains, the character of the

seer emerges in cinema, and "the seer... alienated both within herself and from the world... sees farther, better, and deeper than she can react or think" (Rodowick 2010, 110). As a result, the figure of the seer does not take the automatic or cliché'd narrative path, but instead engages in thought, or the production of new connections between subjects and their environments. For Julian Reid, in his reading of Deleuze, the ultimate political potential of Deleuze's cinematic thought lies in the possibility of "our becoming seers" alongside these characters on screen, because the seer has the potential to witness what is intolerable and unbearable in life (Reid 2011, 231). In other words, there is something about certain films, postwar films in particular for Reid, that have a pro-filmic effect on spectators, which allows them the power to see through cliché and construct a belief in the world in turn.

Without citing Deleuze, A.O. Scott identifies a similar function of cinema in what he dubs "Neo-Neo-Realism" (Scott 2009). The films Scott addresses belong to what I more subtly call Contemporary American Realist Cinema, and include films by Ramin Bahrani, Ryan Fleck, David Gordon Green, So Yong Kim, Jim McKay, and Kelly Reichardt. I turn to Scott's article in the *New York Times*, because it drew critical attention for the claims it made regarding the glossy nature of Hollywood in light of the real hardships of the post-9/11 world (Brody 2009 and Rowin 2009). Especially inflammatory was his question "What kind of movies do we need now?" – Scott follows this by saying:

> It's a question that seems to arise almost automatically in times of crisis. It was repeatedly posed in the swirl of post-9/11 anxiety and confusion, and the consensus answer, at least among studio executives and the entertainment journalists who transcribe their insights, was that, in the wake of such

> unimaginable horror, we needed fantasy, comedy, heroism. (Scott 2009)

While inciting responses from contemporary film critics, Scott's argument resembles the general concerns of the Frankfurt School, and Adorno in particular. I believe this resurgence of Adorno's thought important, considering my argument for the importance of a theoretical framework working between Adorno and Deleuze for contemporary cinematic politics. Furthermore, addressing reasons why *Wendy and Lucy* (2008) would never be considered for an Oscar, while *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) did win an Oscar despite both films focusing on economic hardship, Scott points out "in its story and in its exuberant, sentimental spirit, [*Slumdog Millionaire* is about] the magical power of popular culture to conquer misery, to make dreams come true. And the major function of Oscar night is to affirm that gauzy, enchanting notion" (Scott 2009). In other words, the Oscars ceremony perpetuates, or perhaps is a component of, a propaganda machine affirming majoritarian values. Scott counters this function of Hollywood media, and answers his own question regarding what movies we need, by suggesting, "it would be worth considering that what we need from movies, in the face of a dismaying and confusing real world, is realism" (Scott 2009). Deleuze would likely agree with Scott, because where Scott identifies realism, he also sees the avoidance of particular Hollywood clichés that perpetuate ideologies such as the American Dream. Though they share a political vision, I should note that while Scott's contemporary focus and timeliness is useful for understanding the films I address in this chapter, Deleuze's work adds a depth of understanding as to why these films are politically significant on a formal register with his focus on sensory-motor connections and their disruption.

Bahrani acknowledges this intersection between contemporary American attitudes and a sensory-motor schemata that privileges teleology as morality (or, ideology I would revise). Responding to a question regarding the endings of his own films and their seeming lack clear cut endings, Bahrani explains, "moral endings aren't true to life since life has no intrinsic morality. If you look at Persian poetry, it has an acceptance of life as it is. That's disturbing to most American viewers and you don't find it much in American movies. I find the opposite disturbing" (Porton 2008). Instead of ending his films with definite conclusions and morals, Bahrani leaves his films relatively open ended, a technique he borrows from Kiarostami and other Iranian directors. While there is something evocative of Iranian cinema in Bahrani's use of narrative form, this is a quality of Contemporary American Realist Cinema in general, and Bahrani's comment about morality indicates goals of this larger trend. While the characters of Contemporary American Realist Cinema are often motivated to move towards a particular goal, that goal is never actually realized, unlike in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, where Gardner finally secures his fortune. In doing so, Contemporary American Realist Cinema creates the anticipatory time Rodowick refers to, the non-determined or not yet, and shifts focus from the goals of his characters to their basic realities and experiences. The focus on the everyday lives of Americans, without the injection of Hollywood glamor and grand narratives, promotes the creation of subjects with a belief in the world that allows them to critique the intolerability of the American Dream as an empty cliché. Elsewhere Bahrani has said that what Scott calls 'Hollywood wish-fulfillment tales' "create massive confusion" (Scott 2009). To combat this confusion, Contemporary American Realist Cinema revels in the tangible interactions, gestures, and feelings of

characters from moment to moment. These films do not construct a belief in the world just because they seem true to life, however, but because their characters have an immanent relation with the worlds they inhabit. In other words, they are not able to transcend their milieu, as Gardner does, but instead must react and exist within it. The immanent relationship these characters have with their worlds forces them towards the position of what Deleuze would call the seer, and, as I mentioned previously citing Reid, films that help spectators move towards becoming seers have the ethical and political potential to help spectators see through the hollow clichés such films critique.

The seers of Contemporary American Realist Cinema are different than the seers Deleuze first identifies and to which Reid refers. Not only do they come from quite different circumstances, Italian Neorealism or post-war films for Deleuze and Reid as opposed to modern America for Bahrani and his contemporaries, these latter seers are not purely products of the time-image as Deleuze originally argued. David Martin-Jones has similarly appropriated the concept of the seer to understand the role a child plays in the Argentinian film *Kamchatka* (2002), arguing that this change in context requires a new understanding that goes beyond Deleuze's movement- and time-image categories (Martin-Jones 2011, 70). Whereas Martin-Jones focuses on the child seer's ability to present history cinematically, the seers I refer to are more interested in 'disconnecting networks of uncertainties' as Bogue says, through their powers of vision. Reid clarifies this idea in his juxtaposition of the classical concept of the seer with a more modern, Deleuzian conception:

> Classically, within theater, the seer was conceived and portrayed in his or her exceptionality... a highly particular power to whom a people turned at

> moments of crisis, giving them direction with which to recover their bearings, in order to resume the journey on which they would eventually secure their truths. What modern cinema does, however, is to democratize the seer by depicting him or her in everyday life while also laying stress on the quotidian and fugitive experience of "seeing" within postwar societies. (Reid 2011, 228)

Reid's distinction between types of seers help to differentiate between a classical politics and a modern politics. The former, classical seer served a didactic function: it taught 'a people' what to do or how to be. The latter, modern seer, however, does not teach or act, but witnesses. Similarly, the characters of Contemporary American Realist Cinema are often witnesses rather than agents, and recognize something in modern society active agents with particular agendas do not. As I mentioned previously, they exist immanently with their environments, which creates a more intimate linkage between their surroundings – the environments, mise-en-scene, and other characters of the films, not the sensory-motor connections – and actions than capable in either the action-image with its focus on causal connections and the purely optical-image with its complete lack of causal connections. This difference is important to the political potential of 'seeing' in the context of constructing a belief in the world. These immanent-seers construct a belief in an immanent causality, rather than a transcendental one and this has the potential to inspire a belief in one's ability to act and choose realistically, and to engender our becoming-seers. I will now turn to Bahrani's films in particular in order to illustrate how their seer-like figures encounter something like the American Dream as a broken cliché, and in doing so begin a transition, as biopolitical production, from relatively active agents to becoming immanent-seers that begin to construct a belief in the world.

Man Push Cart: Sisyphean Time and the American Dream

An Iranian-American educated at Colombia University, Ramin Bahrani travelled to Iran to complete his thesis project *Strangers* (2000). This point has often been used by critics to suggest something 'Iranian' about the style of his films, which the director has affirmed in interviews (Kauffman 2008 and 2009; Porton 2008; Sandhu 2009). Regardless of this stylistic influence, however, the three feature films he has made up to this point – *Man Push Cart* (2005), *Chop Shop* (2007), and *Goodbye Solo* (2008) – are focused on very American issues, including particular locales in the United States, immigration in the United States, and the American Dream. Despite his focus on particular locations, Bahrani focuses on diverse communities of individuals or relationships between subjects with drastically different backgrounds. In particular, Bahrani has a preoccupation with the day to day experiences and 'work' of these diverse individuals: *Man Push Cart* follows the push cart vendors of New York City, *Chop Shop* reveals the lives of those working as mechanics in the Iron Triangle, and *Goodbye Solo* probes the life of a taxi driver in North Carolina. Focusing on quotidian lives and environments, however, draws out the virtual registers of these film, and helps Bahrani reveal the sociopolitical layers that are immanent to the subjects he depicts. Defending the Deleuzian 'virtual' against critics that deem it apolitical, Pisters argues, "it is the level of virtuality—consisting of so many larger links *to* reality—surrounding the actual images that makes them so powerful, infusing them with sociopolitical and historical layers and weight. This is precisely the immanence of the virtual at work; it is ultimately political of this world" (Pisters 2012, 251). And while the neoliberal dogma, here identified in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, "does not provide an alibi for exploiting

workers, so much as it positively works to make the status of the worker, and the process of labor-as-exploitation, literally *unthinkable*" as Shaviro argues, Bahrani reverses this argument in making 'the worker' thinkable or tangible to viewers (Shaviro 2011, 79). In doing so, each of these films makes a break with the American Dream by illustrating its intolerability, or its status as a broken cliché, which reveals the immanent relation of their protagonists, to viewers but also the protagonists themselves, to the communities they inhabit.

Ramin Bahrani's *Man Push Cart* details the life of a Pakistani immigrant one year after his wife's death as he goes about his daily life as a pushcart vendor. Reflected in the repeated scenes of the character Ahmad laboriously pulling his cart into place, Bahrani cites Albert Camus' adaptation the "Myth of Sisyphus" as a "key inspiration to the creation of *Man Push Cart*" (Bahrani 2005, DVD extras). Aside from the visual depiction of Ahmad's labor, this inspiration also plays out in the narrative of the film as Ahmad is constantly working towards the (American) dream of owning his own pushcart – a dream that is dashed when his newly purchased cart is stolen. While a romantic encounter with a woman named Noemi takes up a nominal amount of *Man Push Cart*'s narrative, the film's primary focus is on immigration and class difference in New York City. Ahmad, once a rock star in Pakistan, encounters a score of other Pakistani immigrants working in New York, but they exist in vastly different socio-economic circumstances. Some are other pushcart vendors like Ahmad, but others are successful businessmen, like Mohammad, who Ahmad encounters early on in the film. The distinction between these characters illustrates Zygmunt Bauman's concept of

'localization' within globalization, which I raise in my introduction. Bauman argues that "Globalization divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites – the causes of division being identical with those which promote the uniformity of the globe" (Bauman 1998, 2). He later explains that this is a "predicament neither pleasurable nor endurable in the world in which the 'globals' set the tone and compose the rules of the life-game" (Bauman 1998, 2). In other words, the effects of this localization are intolerable to the individuals that experience them, even while taken for granted or as 'part of life'. While Bauman refers to larger global processes and the movement of capital, Ahmad's relationship with Mohammad provides a representative example of this division in a population as it moves globally through the instantiation of class hierarchies. While the film focuses on Ahmad's personal experience, it also collapses the distinction between private and political concerns regarding the formation of subjects due to global movements of capital.

Before coming to New York, Ahmad and Mohammad realize that they once ran in the same social circles in Pakistan. Mohammad recollects an instance where he was attending a party and Ahmad was the 'famous' musician playing at the party. In Pakistan, Ahmad enjoyed a degree of fame and financial success, evidenced by Mohammad's remarks that he and his friends own Ahmad's CDs. He gave up this career, however, to move to the United States for the sake of his wife. While it is unclear as to why he had to move to the United States for his wife, it is clear that this move required him to give up his career and to adopt whatever work he could find in his new home. This work turns out to be working as a pushcart vendor. A brief flashback shows Ahmad and his

wife working happily at their pushcart, with their new child, upon arriving in the United States. After a few years his wife dies, however, for reasons unexplained in the film. As a result, Ahmad is left to work the pushcart alone, and Bauman's 'entrapment' or localization is illustrated in Ahmad's lack of socio-economic mobility. Even after meeting Mohammad and his wealthy Pakistani friends who promise to help restart Ahmad's music career, these friends treat Ahmad like a day laborer. They ask him to paint their houses and man the ticket booths to their clubs. Ahmad initially welcomes the work, an alternative to his other side job of selling pornographic DVDs to other workers in New York City. As Bauman suggests, however, “Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation” (Bauman 1998, 2). Eventually, Ahmad can't take this hierarchical relationship that divides him from the successful Pakistani immigrants, and ceases to work for them. Instead, he returns to his pushcart, which Ahmad seems to perceive as more respectable, if not at least preferable. There is a material difference in that Ahmad works to own his pushcart and is his own boss. As mentioned previously, this work, however, is a Sisyphean effort in the sense that he works off the cost of the pushcart slowly each day, which visually plays out as the film repeats shots of Ahmad pulling his cart through the streets of New York. These scenes begin to critique the American Dream, by denying the ‘break through’ type success seen in *The Pursuit of Happyness*.

The scenes of Ahmad pulling his cart into place hold the film together: so much so, that these scenes occur approximately every ten minutes during the 90 minute film. These scenes consist of visually pleasing pre-dawn shots of Ahmad pulling his cart through

traffic on his way to set up shop for the day. Often these scenes follow into the morning light as Ahmad preps his bagels and cups for tea. These shots emphasize the labor itself through the use of extreme closeups: a hand lighting a burner, cups being placed atop the coffee machine, two hands folding down the sides of a coffee filter, and donuts being place inside a display window. In a sequence detailing this process from the beginning of the film, Ahmad himself is shown only in fragments. The closeups and glimpses at parts of Ahmad – his hands, the back of his head, one of his eyes through a display case – illustrate the cramped nature of the pushcart, but also diffuse Ahmad amongst his work. In this way, the film suggests we cannot understand Ahmad as a subject in his social milieu as separate from his labor. As is true of Contemporary American Realist Cinema in general, these moments focus on quotidian experiences at length. By repeating the action of Ahmad pulling his cart into place throughout the film, *Man Push Cart* presents this work as a Sisyphean effort, a monotonous physical task that is repeated indefinitely. By portraying these scenes in this slow style, the film shifts attention from narrative progression to this simple act. Comparing this aspect of Bahrani's films to Kiarostami and Amir Naderi, Scott argues, "Most of the scenes in the film take place outdoors, and while there is a clear, poignant story, it takes shape not through expository dialogue but through gestures, actions and details that the camera absorbs in long, patient shots" (Scott 2009). The act of pulling the cart into place is significant on several registers besides evidencing the film's existential aesthetic. Ahmad eventually mentions that he is saving up for a new apartment, so that he can live with his son who is currently being taken care of by his in-laws – an attempt to create the stability, shelter and security for his family promised by the American Dream. This

too seems like a Sisyphean effort as he must first pay off his pushcart, but it adds a human element to these previously formally interesting scenes. Furthermore, these quotidian moments are the experiences that are invisible to the general public that buy products from Ahmad. As one customer says to Ahmad later in the film, “I'm usually not up this early”, as he addresses the 'new guy' at the pushcart. While dwelling on Ahmad's work through long tracking shots, while pushing the cart, and close ups of Ahmad's hands prepping food and cups of tea, when in the cart itself, the film dwells on an existential register, but the particularly evocative quality of *Man Push Cart* is in the way it reveals the personal desires behind this daily work. It is not just that Ahmad and the pushcart vendors go through this banal, Sisyphean effort daily, but that this effort belies a more personal dimension at face value. *Man Push Cart* reveals this personal dimension through gestures, actions, and details that reveals the previously unknowable Other as full of history, life, dreams, and desires.

While sharing the similarity of a protagonist attempting to provide security for his son, unlike *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Man Push Cart* ends on a tragic note. Ahmad's cart, which he has just paid off and now owns, is stolen while he buys a toy flute for his son. Long shots, lengthier than even the shots of his morning labor, track Ahmad as he searches amidst the crowds of New York for his cart. While the action seems frenetic, the deliberate focus of the camera on the failure of the search is slow. The film requires the spectator to behold Ahmad's loss and desperation for over five minutes while he looks for his cart. Finally, he goes to Mohammad to ask for a loan. Without his cart, he cannot work and he needs five-thousand dollars. Mohammad, however, keeps their

hierarchical relationship intact, refusing a loan and berating him for his work on Mohammad's home. Though he keeps up the pretense that Ahmad is a 'brother', ultimately the wealthy 'set the tone and compose the rules of the life-game'. Without the ability to work, Ahmad loiters on the street until a friend comes by with car trouble. He asks Ahmad to work his pushcart for him while he takes care of his car, and Ahmad agrees. The film ends mirroring the opening scenes of the film, and the many quotidian moments throughout, with Ahmad setting up shop for the day. In this way, the Sisyphean time presented by the film structures the entirety of the films narrative in its circular structure, not just the slow and repetitive shots of labor visually depicted on screen. While the theft of his pushcart seems as if it mirrors the theft of the bike in *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), there is a sense in this older film that Antonio might transcend their economic circumstances if they retrieve his bike, Bahrani's film argues something different about contemporary America with its focus on labor – that for this class, the labor is endless and there is no 'way out', not just that Ahmad has somehow missed his opportunity. As soon as Ahmad gets a chance at breaking the Sisyphean cycle and achieving his version of the American Dream, by owning his own cart, this opportunity is shattered and he returns to the endless labor we, as spectators, have carefully watched throughout the film. In other words, Ahmad returns to his localized existence, where the life of the pushcart vendor defines his daily experience and there seems little chance of upward mobility. While the film works on an ethical register, by arguing that this 'Other', the pushcart vendor, is a fully-developed person in his own right rather than a nameless figure, it also works on a more political register in this conclusion. It becomes political by enforcing Bauman's critique and revealing the American Dream as an

intolerable and broken cliché. The film argues, contrary to the majoritarian discourse surrounding the Dream, that as hard as this population works, there is a natural division that renders portions of population in a Sisyphean stasis: even with the hard work there is little hope that they will move beyond their current circumstances.

Ahmad's lack of mobility – and this is an argument that can be extended to Bahrani's other films – works to both pierce the aura of the American Dream and to set up Ahmad as a seer-like figure. On the level of the narrative, *Man Push Cart* makes a clear statement regarding the efficacy of the American Dream. Just as Ahmad is about to realize the American Dream – not the glossy dream of fancy cars in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, but at least the more majoritarian American Dream Clark identifies in *Immigrants and the American Dream: Remaking the Middle Class* – he loses everything he has worked for when someone steals his cart. The fact that bad luck, although several characters suggest that the man Ahmad purchases the cart from is "no good", strips Ahmad of his dream in an instant resonates with current states of affair in the United States, where a single trip to the hospital can simultaneously drain one's life savings and plunge one into debt, because of the lack of public health care and basic social securities. This financial security (or lack thereof) is core to the American Dream Clark identifies in immigrant populations (Clark 2003, 24 and 26). As *Man Push Cart* illustrates, however, while attempting to achieve this stability, one is still susceptible to situations that can force one back to step one, and furthermore that achieving the level of financial stability required for a secure, middle class lifestyle is doubly difficult to attain when in the position of Ahmad. Due to this insecurity, immigrants in the United

States are subject to a type of 'stuttering' that plays out cinematically in *Man Push Cart* and Bahrani's other films.

The depletion of Ahmad's savings and his return the beginning of his quest for the American Dream illustrates a stuttering of Ahmad's life plan in terms of the narrative of *Man Push Cart*, but this stuttering also plays out through the repetitive scenes that make up Ahmad's Sisyphean task. Unlike Gardner, who constantly overcomes the obstacles he faces, Ahmad is constantly unable to act or react to the situations he faces. This is particular noticeable in the difference between Ahmad and Mohammad. Ahmad constantly defers the fact that he was a rock star in Pakistan, whereas Mohammad tries to emphasize it to his advantage, speaking for Ahmad at times. After downplaying his history as a rock star by responding to Mohammad's claims, "He's kidding," at a party, another successful Pakistani tells him to "Own it". Acting and achieving are the modes of these characters, but Ahmad mostly mumbles throughout the film. Towards the end of the film, this stuttering is emphasized when Ahmad actually stumbles in one of the scenes where he is pulling his cart into place. As a result of this constant stuttering, Ahmad mostly observes what goes on around him. This facet of his character is so extreme that he lets Mohammad ask Noemi on dates right in front of him despite their burgeoning romance. *Man Push Cart* makes the claim that these qualities of Ahmad's subjectivity either reinforce or are reinforced by his marginal status as an immigrant who is not able to achieve the American Dream, and if this is the case it suggests a feature of the class of subjects within the United States who are economically insecure. If seer-like characters also engender the potential of our 'becoming-seers' as Reid puts

it, Ahmad's status and the cinematic presentation of this status has the potential to reveal to the spectator a new way of seeing through the eyes and experiences of these subjects.

In addition to the promotion of seer-like figures, this cinematic stuttering ruptures the sensory-motor schema that defines majoritarian cinematic time. This rupture is useful to return to at this point, because key to the 'minor' work of art and its disruption of majoritarian codes is the construction of a collective enunciation: here important to determining whether these films somehow speak to an immigrant-subjectivity or experience in the United States in relation to the American Dream. Modern political films can create a stuttering effect through their intensive use of cinematic language, and in the case of *Man Push Cart* this includes the decadent and repetitive shots of Ahmad's labor. This presents a rupture in clear narrative progression, and opens the film up to potential readings, allowing for new political speech. Dwelling on these moments in duration forces the viewer to think, and to consider how things could be otherwise. Simon O'Sullivan argues that this thinking otherwise, and the rupture in straightforward narratives it suggests,

> gives such art a utopian function inasmuch as part of its being is somehow located elsewhere. Importantly, and following Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, we can understand this as a specifically immanent utopia – intrinsically connected to the present, made out of the same materials, the same matter (after all what else is there?) but calling 'for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist.' (O'Sullivan 2009, 248)

While I agree with the theoretical trajectory O'Sullivan identifies here insofar as this engenders a potential and immanent political community, I do not agree that this necessitates the utopian nature of thinking otherwise. I would argue, stressing the immanence of this arrangement, the daily experience and labor, that the utopian

tendency he identifies here can as easily describe the emergence of the Multitude through its allowance of multiple entry points into the film and its 'collective enunciation' that speaks to a diverse population sharing the experience to which the film commits. As a result, the film's depiction of Multitude, through diverse populations comprising the street-food scene of New York, the multiple languages and different histories, but also the cooperation, is accompanied by formal features that similarly allow the construction of Multitude through the rupture of cliché cinematic modes – in this case, by the Sisyphean depiction of labor.

An encounter with the intolerable accompanies this seer-like function of *Man Push Cart*, however: the impracticality of the American Dream points directly to the class divide that Ahmad finds intolerable in the film. After Ahmad's cart is stolen, he turns to Mohammad in desperation, because of earlier professions of good will and brotherhood between the two. Mohammad rejects Ahmad's request for money to keep his business going, however, and starts asking Ahmad to leave his apartment with increasing aggression. Ahmad finally lashes out, knocking Mohammad on the ground. The violence is minor, and does not resolve the situation, but rather illustrates the point where Ahmad fully realizes the intolerability of his economic insecurity, the fruitlessness of his hard work, and falsity of his American Dream. Realizing the infeasibility of the Dream in relation to the class difference engendered in Ahmad and Mohammad's global movements – a realization that pierces the veil of the American Dream in revealing it as cliché – allows Ahmad, and viewers, to turn to a more active approach to the world that does not rely on this majoritarian ideology. While the film

ends on a relatively mournful note, with Ahmad repeating his work at a pushcart, there is a sense that this is repetition with a difference: when asked by a customer if he'll be filling in for his friend for awhile, he responds, “Yeah, only for a little while”, suggesting new horizons unstymied by Dream that structured the previous repetition in the film. This reading is encouraged by Bahrani's next film, *Chop Shop*, where Ahmad appears again in a new role, having left the push cart scene.

Chop Shop **and Realist Immanence**

Chop Shop charts the experience of a young boy named Alejandro (or Ale) as he takes a job at Willets Point, or the Iron Triangle, in New York and pursues his dream of buying a food truck so that he and his sister can work together. The Iron Triangle earned its name from the many junkyards and automobile repair shops that have moved into the area, establishing it as a unique destination for automobile repairs. As depicted in the film, individuals in need of car repairs can travel to Willets Point for a 'one-stop shopping' experience, as there are many repair garages sitting side-by-side with various auto parts. Willets Point is relatively off the grid, so much so that it has been refused infrastructural improvements to streets and sewers in the past, and customers can haggle with the owners of the repair shops, no doubt making it a much more affordable option than auto shops elsewhere in the city. As a result, Willets Point also attracts questionable practices. *Chop Shop* addresses prostitution, the stripping of (probably) stolen cars, and child labor. This setting and seeming separation from the 'normal' conditions for citizens of the United States marks Willets Point as an area with a very different economic discourse. This discourse is not so un-American, however: the complete disavowal of government, law, and thriving of free market relations also makes Willets Point out to

be a bastion of uncompromised neoliberalism. Despite this alterity, Ale stands out like a beacon of optimism or what seems to be the last vestige of the American Dream in this place. In this respect, the narrative of *Chop Shop* closely follows that of *Man Push Cart,* with Ale saving the money he earns and stashing it in a secret savings tin. Also like *Man Push Cart,* however, Ale's dreams are dashed just as it seems he is about to achieve his goal of owning his own food truck. The final shattering of Ale's (American) dream is a last step in a process that breaks down Ale's childlike naivete throughout the film. In doing so, the film actively works to replace transcendent aspirations and dreams with an immanent realism that Ale cannot avoid as a localized subject.

The film begins with an homage to Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry*, as Ale waits with a group of day-laborers trying to get picked up for some work. The difference between *Taste of Cherry* and *Chop Shop* is important in this instance, however, in that Ale is the subject of the film, a laborer himself, rather than the wealthy protagonist of Kiarostami's film. Ale is not picked for work, despite his vocal desire for a job, so he steals away in the back of the foreman's truck anyway. He eventually catches Ale and kicks him out, giving him some money for breakfast. The following scene shows Ale and his friend selling candy on the subway, with the speech: "Excuse me ladies and gentlemen sorry for the interruption, my name is Alejandro, we are not going to lie to you, we are not here selling candy for no school basketball team, in fact I don't even go to school and if you want me to go back to school I have candy for you". Similar to the repetition in *Man Push Cart,* this sequence begins to repeat shortly after it concludes. These scenes illustrate Ale's ingenuity in navigating the capitalist environment, even though he lives

outside mainstream channels of labor and pay. They also illustrate his desire to work hard, a point that is reiterated when his friend connects him with a shop owner at the Iron Triangle. Rob, Ale's boss in the Iron Triangle, clearly respects Ale's work ethic throughout the film. In addition to working for Rob, Ale finds various other ways to make money in the film such as working for Ahmad, the same character from *Man Push Cart,* who now owns a shop in the Iron Triangle. Because Rob provides Ale with a small apartment in his shop, he invites his sister Isamar to come live with him. Ale's desire to provide for his sister mimics Clark's middle class dream in that he is able to provide a 'home' for his sister and, he thinks, a relatively secure situation. After moving in, Isamar also begins working in the Iron Triangle at a food truck. Ale and Isamar's life seems good, and there are scenes that evidence this fact with Ale and Isamar going shopping and even buying expensive sneakers, a sign of relative financial success. While this film has documented the unique community of the Iron Triangle up until this point, and Ale's pursuance of the American Dream, this narrative begins to break down when Ale discovers that his sister has been prostituting herself at a truck stop in the Iron Triangle. It turns out that their relative security, the ability to buy nice clothes and grape soda, is built upon Isamar's prostitution. Ale's idealism is further compromised when, upon finally purchasing the food truck he has been saving for, Ahmad explains that it will never pass health code. This penultimate event in the film simultaneously breaks down Ale's ability to blindly follow the American Dream and the notion that the Iron Triangle is a neoliberal paradise.

When Ale shows his new food truck to Ahmad, the following dialogue takes place:

> Ahmad: Ale are you stupid or something?
> Ale: What?
> Ahmad: Look inside this place man, all of this stuff has got to pass health code.
> Ale: They don't do a health code around here. They don't even care about it.
> Ahmad: Ale man, look at this grill, okay, it has rust on it. Of course it does.
> Ale: So what?
> Ahmad: It says it right here, did you even read this? [referring to bill of sale]

Earlier in the film, however, Isamar prods Ale for the fact that he never went to school. It is likely that he does not know how to read, a product of the supposed freedom from government intervention Ale raises when he says 'they don't do health code around here'. As Ahmad points out, however, "You're going to spend $10,000 to fix that [buying new kitchen equipment]… I used to have one of these", in a nod to *Man Push Cart*. At this point in the film, the previously industrious Ale now performs a number of failed gestures, which causes the narrative to begin to stutter. He attacks his friend who introduced him to the man that sold him the food truck, but his friend has no idea what is happening and the fight dissolves soon after it starts. He plays around in the defunct food truck, shifting the gears that clearly do not work. He fails to respond to Ahmad's several solutions he offers, even after Ahmad reiterates, "let me know what you want to do". When Rob confronts him about the poorly managed purchase, he dumbly responds, "Can I have my pay?" The request is oddly not connected to any causal situation and is quickly rejected. Whereas his previous connection to the American Dream structured his relationship with work by forming a clear trajectory from his present labors to a successful future, Ale's empty actions in this sequence illustrate the destabilization of this causal ideology in the film. Previously a smooth talker, Ale's vacant gaze used as a response to questions concerning the worthlessness of his cart illustrates this shift in his subjectivity. After again wandering around his defunct truck, he heads to the nearby

stadium where he steals a woman's purse. He succeeds at this action resulting from his spiral into desperation, but everyone he approaches refuses to buy the pilfered phone he finds in the purse – eventually, he tosses the useless object back in with his stash of unsold bootleg DVDs. When Isamar asks Ale why he's trying to sell the phone, he says, "I'm working. You should be working too". This veiled reference to her prostitution reveals Ale's disenchantment with his previous idealism, in the revelation that he knows she has been prostituting herself, but also that he seems to finally 'see' what is actually going on around him. In other words, he finally enters the positions of the seer who 'sees farther, better, and deeper than she can react or think', as Rodowick puts it. Stripped of his ability to constantly act in line with ideology that has previously structured his life, he witnesses some of the *reality* around him. In *Chop Shop* this reality that Ale perceives helps to mitigate the confusion both Scott and Bahrani suggest pervades modern Hollywood productions and modern American society. In doing so, it also helps to construct a belief in the world.

After Ale discards the unsold phone, the film cuts to a short sequence where he and Ahmad start dismantling the food truck, the final signal that he has given up on his dream and the point at which the biopolitical production of subjectivity is most visible. Ale's work is slow and ponderous, and the scene itself is laden with the factors that led to their dismantling of the food truck. Not just the scenes that preceded this one, but the intangible factors such as Ale's constant idealism. In this scene, "objects and settings [*milieux*] take on an autonomous, material reality which gives them an importance in themselves" as Deleuze argues of the 'new realism' (Deleuze 1989, 4). Even though the

scene seems relatively ordinary, the connotations the Ale's labor takes on at this point creates what Patricia Pisters has referred to as a "camera consciousness [that is] no longer defined by the movements it is able to follow or make, but by the mental connections it is able to enter into" (Pisters 2003, 15). This is particularly true in connection with what Adrian Martin has called the 'Social Mise en Scène' of the film, which imbues the shop and the broken down food truck, set amidst the heaps of auto parts that make up the Iron Triangle, a component in the construction of Ale's class-based subjectivity and colors his relationship with the American Dream (Martin 2009). The sequence that depicts the dismantling of the food truck is shot in just three long takes. First, a crane shot watches Ale and Ahmad from above as they work on the food truck. The second shot shows Ale in a medium close-up as he stares vacuously into space. During these shots, the cheers and roar of a distant crowd can be heard, emanating from the nearby Shea Stadium, providing a soft backdrop to the clicks and clanks of their dismantling of the truck. The third shot follows Ale as he climbs a set of stairs to pack away the steering column from the truck. Towards the end of this shot, the camera drops lower while it tracks Ale's movement to the left, anticipating his bending over to place the steering column on the ground. The camera pans vertically to follow Ale as he stands up and suddenly reveals the bright lights of Shea Stadium in the distance and the source of the soundtrack in this scene, with Ale turning to gaze in that direction. While the defunct truck and shops strewn with parts provide a Social Mise en Scène that evidences Ale's class-based subjectivity, the sounds of this sequence and eventual revelation of Shea Stadium's location more precisely describe Ale's newly distanced relationship with the glamor the stadium represents.

The subsequent scene follows Ale as he returns to his and Isamar's workshop apartment. Ale's vacant stare reveals the weight of Isamar's absence, as he correctly assumes that she is out prostituting herself. This fact, now intolerable to Ale, a broken cliché for the poor who have no other options, prompts him to set out to look for her. Slow laborious shots follow Ale as he walks to the truck stop to look for her. When he realizes she is in a car across the lot, a single long take follows Ale as he opens the car she is in and starts hitting the man she is with. Ale's action marks a turning point in the film: previously aware of Isamar's prostitution, he did nothing, but this time the intolerability drives him to act. The scuffle that ensues is short and without conclusion, Ale and Isamar end up running away, but it would be hard to call this a reinvestment of the sensory-motor schema. After the scuffle, nothing fundamental seems to have changed about their situation. Instead, this scene illustrates a shift in Ale's understanding of the world and his own place within it. Previously, he grappled with an intangible dream of owning property and achieving a form of economic prosperity, but this was not a belief in the world but a belief in the ideology of the American Dream that overcoded his basic experience. Now, after the collapse of this dream, he is able to see the real injustices around him and, seemingly, seeks to change them, illustrating the transformation, or production, of subjectivity. This is no new Hollywood tale, however: Ale does not end prostitution in the Iron Triangle by force of his justice alone – this is why his action in this case is relatively unsuccessful, and the film does not dwell on its consequences – but he at least acts in favor of the reality he wants to create. In other words, Ale now has the power of choice that he was previously stripped of as he followed what he believed

to be a personal dream. Rather than confronting his sister earlier in the film, he used the money she made to contribute to buying the food truck, meaning he really made no choice at all – or, as Deleuze might say, he was stripped of his power to choose by blindly following his dream. While Scott is vague with regards to what issues Hollywood glamor veils, in the case of *Chop Shop,* giving up on the American Dream allows Ale to confront prostitution in his community, a *choice* that has the potential to positively impact his immediate community and the world around him.

While Ale's revelation and transition from one blindly following an ideology to a person of *choice* or *belief* calls "for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist", as O'Sullivan acknowledges, and that this new form is immanent to the present (made from the same material and forms, rather than a complete substitution or transcendence), I do not agree that this involves the instantiation of a utopian form (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 108). Perhaps O'Sullivan uses the term 'utopian' loosely to mean 'new', but if he does consider the creation of the new to be an idealism, I would argue that this is not the case in Deleuze's cinematic ethico-politics. This is because, for Deleuze, there is no ideal or utopian form that is to be established: the future form is a blank diagram. In modern political films, the reason for this is that it is based on the biopolitical production of subjectivities, which have no predetermined causal link with what communities, forms of social organization, or politics the people to come will engage. In other words, it rejects a utopianism because there is no *blueprint* for the future. What is important to Deleuze, and this is where we see Scott arguing something similar to Deleuze, is that the 'people' - the characters in the film, the spectators viewing

the film – engage in a form of becoming where they are able to turn towards their immediate environments and their ability to interact with and change them. For Scott, realism has the potential to make people realize that the gaudy Hollywood tales are not helping to mitigate real life suffering. Adorno made a similar argument in regards to Hollywood cinema in the early 1940's and its goal of overcoding audience expectations and desires (and even its biopolitical production of a particular subject). Whereas Adorno offered no counter argument, no solution, Scott suggests that certain US Independents are moving towards a counter argument to the culture industry, and they do so through, I argue, a cinematic politics that introduces a rupture to majoritarian discursive regimes. Contra O'Sullivan, there is no ideal circumstance that would replace the ideologies perpetuated by much Hollywood cinema, but in modern political films there does exist the possibility of engaging in biopolitical production of subjectivities on screen that engenders the biopolitical production of spectators, or the possibility of our 'becoming seers'. The difference between representing an ideal replacement for a contemporary situation and the biopolitical production of subjects is important, because it allows for the emergence of political solutions as new ways of being in the world.

The Collapse of the Dream, an Immanent Politics

The sensory-motor schemata that organizes films based around Action-Images, or series of actions and reactions, is particularly well-suited to wish fulfillment tales, where the actions of an individual character to triumph over their trials results in a new situation. *The Pursuit of Happyness* is a representative example of this type of story, as it perpetuates the American Dream as an achievable ideal. In doing so, the film prioritizes a subject that understands he can 'get ahead' if he just 'works hard enough'. The

definition of the American Dream that plays out in the film is one held by United States citizens more generally, as shown through polling and these popular representations. As a result, this concept of the American Dream becomes a majoritarian ideology in the United States, structuring the way people think and the political decisions that they make. The reciprocal emotional exchange between subjects who ascribe to these ideologies and the films that derive from them create a feedback loop where these majoritarian ideas and subjects feed upon and reinforce one another. They also construct a situation where it becomes 'impossible to choose otherwise', as the correct narrative or subject position seems to be already laid out. This position restricts the potential for political discussion, however, since it relies on the conformity of subjects and desires. The inability for these films to engage in biopolitical production results in the general defeat of democracy despite America's catechism "land of the free". The modern political films I turn to, however, begin to break down reliance on the American Dream and introduce the fragmentation of this 'national' ideology, which allows a more immanent politics.

The films by Ramin Bahrani I address introduce a rupture in the majoritarian discourse of the American Dream. In each film, this is done through the narrative arc of the film, but also formally through repetitive scenes of banal labor, the part that is left out or romanticized in films such as *The Pursuit of Happyness.* This interruption of the American Dream is important to the political function of Bahrani's films, because it disrupts the propaganda machine that serves to construct subjects that further reinforce the same ideas. In doing so, it allows the introduction of new ideas and new subjects, or

the transformation of subjects, on screen. In this respect, Bahrani's films more directly engage with the American Dream and the subjects most often involved in discussions of the American Dream. Clark points out that the American Dream is most often the dream of people immigrating to America. While not a complete restriction of who subscribes to such ideologies, Adams also notes the interest of visitors to America in the perceived freedom or potential alongside his original articulation of the Dream. Bahrani's films illustrates this point by depicting areas and communities as diverse networks of immigrants. In *Man Push Cart,* the film mainly follows a community of Pakistani immigrants, but also includes immigrants from Latin-America and Spain, as well as African-American and White non-immigrants. *Chop Shop* follows a pair of Latin-American youths as they intermingle with the similarly diverse group of people working in the Iron Triangle, again taking place in New York. And although I did not have room to address it here, *Goodbye Solo,* Bahrani's third feature adds the Senegalese Solo to the mix of subjects, who is a particularly diverse character – coming from a former colony of France, and therefore speaking Wolof and French (as well as Spanish, due to his being in a relationship with a Latin-American woman). All of these films openly display this diversity through their use of multiple languages and presentation of various classes of individuals (in terms of economic status, race, and gender). While these films follow the peoples most susceptible to the American Dream, they simultaneously illustrate its fantasy. In playing out this ideology while breaking with it in terms of the conclusions they draw, namely that hard work does not lead to success to the extent one who believes in the Dream might imagine, these films make minor use of this majoritarian ideology. The sober ending of these films, each protagonist returning to work in his

community, illustrates a more realistic and sustainable vision of the American Dream that resembles more closely what James Truslow Adams originally described it as.

This original articulation of the American Dream described a diverse group of individuals working together to create a resource that they might share together, something similar to the push cart scene in New York or the Iron Triangle. While such communities might not be an example of economic prosperity, as opposed to Gardner's success in *The Pursuit of Happyness*, they at least depict a sustainable community where the individuals can make a living. While I am not arguing that these communities present a utopian future, their depiction in these films at least allows for the proliferation of different voices, rather than requiring them to adopt a particular ideology and identity. As a result, these films provide an alternative to majoritarian cinemas, and, as Scott suggests, a politically productive realism. By depicting the labor of life, these films promote a turn towards the world that is capable of constructing what Deleuze calls a belief in the world and one's ability to change it. In other words, rather than chasing a transcendental idealism, these films inspire one to work towards new, collaborative solutions immanent to the world these characters exist in, and the potential for these communities to work together. While the conclusions of these films are not as flashy or fantastic as *The Pursuit of Happyness,* they suggest smaller examples of where one can begin a productive process of experimentation that leads to a new political reality. They avoid such glamor, because it involves a turning away from the world in a general movement that suggests not real world change, but dreams of an other world that results in a paralysis in the present. As mentioned previously, this is a problem

chronicled by Adorno, Scott, and Deleuze, but this Contemporary American Realist Cinema suggests an immanent solution through their operation as modern political films by critiquing what has become a majoritarian cinematic and social trend through their depiction of labor, diverse subjectivities, and the falsity of overcoding ideology.

The Modern Political Film:
An Ethico-Political Trajectory

In this thesis, I have focused on the production of cinematic subjectivity as an alternative to more overt and dialectical political modes of cinema, a biopolitical commitment as it addresses the class of subjects and the ways of being in the world in the form of socio-ontological milieu. The modern political film is unique within the greater field of 'political films' in that it mobilizes fiction film to critique dominant or majoritarian frameworks by illustrating a burgeoning 'other' story within them. Even more significant, I argue that this political framework is necessary to understanding the rupture World War Two presents in Deleuze's thought. In illustrating the shift between the movement-image and time-image, Deleuze mentions not a historical movement, but illustrates one point of rupture where these other stories emerge, despite the general strategy of overcoding employed by state and otherwise dominant powers. Despite Deleuze's use of World War Two as an explanatory tool, I show the modern political cinema revealing nascent peoples within four contemporary cinematic contexts:

> the citizens of Algiers beginning to forge global-identities despite repression from the military and religious extremism;
>
> the Kurds attempting to articulate a notion of Kurdistan and Kurdish identity, and urban youth in Tehran who envision a freer society, who face restrictions on filmmaking and the expression of identity more generally;
>
> Chinese citizens suddenly faced with a post-socialist environment attempting to articulate their own volatile positions within this new global economic framework against the PRC's regulation of such expression;
>
> and peoples in the United States, entrenched within the ideological framework of the American Dream, a majoritarian cultural trope, who must distance themselves from it in order to take a more sustainable stance towards the future.

In each of these examples, a diverse people emerges through the production of subjects

that cannot be contained by a homogenous framework. The phrasing 'people to come' illustrates a revelation about these cinematic contexts: the collective desires that constitutes a people were already there, overflowing majoritarian boundaries, and modern political films manifest these desires.

The global focus of this project points to a significant facet of the modern political cinema in that the subjects depicted in and created through these films respond to the flows or intensities of an increasingly global network. As I argued in my introduction, through technological innovation and global economic practices, globalization increasingly affects subjects on a socio-cultural level. This does not mean the homogenization of subjects, however, but the fragmentation of subjects due to conflicts created by the different material and cultural networks subjects are composed of. Each context involves the acknowledgment of global cultural and economic forces and their relation to the production of subjectivity:

> in Algiers, *Bab El-Oued City* illustrates the impossibility of conforming to a particular subject due to the desire for global products, movement, and lifestyles;
>
> in Ghobadi's films, the movement of the Kurds reveals a desire restricted by the borders of the four nations that contain Kurdistan, and *No One Knows About Persian Cats* pushes this sentiment further by focusing on a set of subjects who do not want to be restricted by the Islamic-Iranian subjectivity laws in Iran establish (such as the inability to produce and consume Western music);
>
> in depicting the post-socialist environment in China, Jia's films respond directly to simultaneous economic and cultural globalization and movement of peoples (or the lack thereof);
>
> Bahrani's films focus on the American Dream as it lures immigrants from around the world to the United States in hopes of a better future, only to find a broken cliché.

The global focus of this project does not just illustrate the fact that modern political

films are emerging around the world today, but that the global nature of these films is endemic to their political nature.

The political mode of these films centers around the ability of these films to construct what Deleuze refers to as a belief in the world through an encounter with something intolerable. Belief in this context establishes an immanent relation to life, since it refers to a belief in one's immediate relations, environment, and desires, as opposed to transcendental, overcoding, and majoritarian ideologies. Deleuze often refers to this latter category as 'cliché', because they are often ideologies followed without a clear understanding of why, established as natural through a process of alienation. Modern political films rupture cliché and majoritarian ideologies, presenting intolerables that activate a critical interest in the majoritarian discourses. While in my introduction I examined this process within the trends of 'minor cinemas' such as the critique of national cinemas, diaspora, and identity, in this project I suggest that it is rather the biopolitical production of subjectivity that provides the political response of these films. In other words, subjectivity is actively created or fragmented to illustrate the reductive nature of majoritarian regimes. As Deleuze, following Bergson, argues, it is time that allows for invention, and, as I argue, the time-image needs to be thought of as a rupture in the movement-image in the sense that it allows for new thought to break with cliché. While I do not mean to equate the modern political film and the time-image, as I think the biopolitical production of subjectivity can occur independently of time-images, modern political films are often accompanied by a new sense of time:

> in *Bab El-Oued City*, the refusal of narrative conclusion to be replaced by a messianic waiting suggests the desire for, if not the democracy that was thwarted

> in the 1990's, other ways of being in the world;
>
> Ghobadi introduces ruptures in his narratives in the form of sound situations in *Half-Moon* and music videos in *No One Knows About Persian Cats* that express not utopia, but an other possibility that counters restrictions placed on peoples in Iran;
>
> Jia makes use of a 'postsocialist realist time' that resists the teleology of 'master narratives', which, in the case of the films I address here, would gloss over the turbulence real individuals face due to economic modernization;
>
> Bahrani's films slow down in what I call Contemporary American Realist Cinema to present the daily banality of their subjects, which, similar to postsocialist realist time, creates a critical disjuncture with the American Dream as master narrative and its sensory-motor connections.

Each of these films includes a form of time that ruptures the majoritarian time of most mainstream motion pictures, characterized by Deleuze as the causal connections engendered by the sensory-motor schemata. While the particular effect of this rupture differs depending on the film, as they are part of very different socio-historical contexts, the rupture itself points to the dual impossibility of writing in the majoritarian language and of not writing at all that characterizes the minor (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16). The effect for these texts is a cinematic time markedly different from mainstream films, that points to “the impossibility of living now in 'this' society” (Deleuze 1989, 222).

In moving from the rupture of majoritarian discourses, through the (global) biopolitical production of subjects, the modern political film presents a cohesive political project. Elements of this project run throughout Deleuze's work alone and with Guattari, some of which I include and others which I could not within the length of this project. I add several important facets to this project, however, which revitalize the political elements of *Cinema 2* for further study, as well as Deleuze's ethical thinking. First, I articulate the

transition from the movement-image to the time-image as the minor creating a rupture within the major. Engaging this framework in terms of the minor allows me to introduce Adorno's concept of the culture industry explicitly. Adorno's framework provides insight into the operation of cliché for Deleuze, and also provides a Foucauldian-Marxist framework for understanding how legal, cultural, and economic discourses code subjectivity. While Adorno frames this as a process operating within Hollywood, I extend his arguments to include a wider array of industries and contexts. Second, I address the explicitly global nature of contemporary political films. While I do not restrict modern political films to texts that explicitly address globalization, I would argue films that avoid addressing extra-national issues are more likely to construct a classical politics, such as *Battle of Algiers* (even as *Outside the Law* tells the same story within a global context, the classical politics begin to break down). Finally, and perhaps most importantly for an ethical understanding of the modern political film, I address the people to come not as a clear subject-group in the making, but as the production of subjectivity itself. Deleuze was vague in terms of what actually constitutes the 'people to come'. This was a necessary vagueness, perhaps, because he also argued that constituting the people to come is not an ethical move. It is not ethical, because it easily replaces a master narrative with one that is possibly just as repressive. This disables cinema's potential, or at least critics addressing cinema, to construct a positive critique based on the idea of a 'people to come' when they are stripped of the ability to describe what this people looks like. I offer a solution in the form of the biopolitical production of subjectivity. The subjects are present, perhaps repressed, but rather than being a uniform people, they are depicted in their diversity and emergent process of Becoming.

This allows the film, and film viewer, the ability to both define a people and allow this people to engage with the political forces of creation and innovation. If the modern political film deserves further study today, it is for this reason: it reveals how cinema can continue to revitalize political discussions, not by giving answers, but by exhuming the potential of films and film-viewers to co-create new ways of being in the world.

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