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Johan Fornäs & Martin Fredriksson

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Culturalisation at an Australian–Swedish Crossroads

By Johan Fornäs & Martin Fredriksson

There is a widespread understanding that processes of *culturalisation* and *globalisation* characterise the present era. Although they are often imagined as separate phenomena, these two discourses are deeply interrelated. On the one hand, culture – in any of its many forms – seems to expand and acquire an increasingly central role in political, economic, and social life. The discourses of aestheticisation, mediatisation, creative or experience industries, and knowledge societies put cultural aspects into the focus of regional planning, sustainable growth, and concerns for democracy and social cohesion in a late modern world. Culturalisation is a general term for all such claims, summing up a cluster of processes, discourses, and practices, transforming the position and meaning of culture in society at large. This trend has fuelled the emergence, growth, and transnational spread of interdisciplinary cultural studies, offering useful interfaces for scholars who, from different backgrounds, study the changing societal roles of cultural practices.

Culture has tended to be discussed within national contexts where international aspects have been limited to acknowledging dominant nations' cultural influence over less powerful ones. But the growing networks of transport, trade, travel, tourism, migration, and communication have redefined the relations between the local and the global. Discourses of diversity, hybridity, and transnational flows have made it increasingly futile to confine oneself to local or national understandings of culture. The process of globalisation captures this cluster of ideas, with its economic and political as well as social and aesthetic dimensions increasingly enmeshed with the aforementioned process of culturalisation.

These two processes (and their corresponding complex discourses) feed upon each other. Intensified transnational encounters make interpretations of media texts and cultural representations an urgent task in politics, business, and everyday life. The increased foregrounding of culture in social life is often experienced as a global trend that calls for local accommodation. Globalisation may be seen as one facet and force of culturalisation, at the same time as culturalisation may be interpreted as one of the main forms of globalisation. Still, surprisingly, much research remains anchored to only one of these dimensions, neglecting to explore and analyse their dynamic interaction and exchange.

The intersection of culturalisation and globalisation has formed the basis for a four-year collaboration project between the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS, formerly the Centre for Cultural Research) at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) in Australia and the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q) at Linköping University (LiU) in Sweden: two departments that share a common interest in the

transformations of culture in a global era. ICS addresses the cultural challenges and contradictions of a world that is increasingly globalised, heterogeneous, and technologically mediated. It approaches culture as a vital dimension of social, political, and economic life, seeking to build the cultural intelligence needed for a complex and changing world and researching cultural diversity. Tema Q is an interdisciplinary research unit at Linköping University dedicated to studying a wide range of areas that in different ways connect to the concept and consequences of culturalisation, such as cultural politics, media practices, representation and cultural production, institutions of cultural heritage, and the uses of history.

The exchange programme, running from 2008 to 2012, was initiated by Advanced Cultural Studies of Sweden (ACSIS) – a national network of cultural studies based at Tema Q – and funded by the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT). It enabled a number of joint workshops and PhD courses exploring the interfaces between culturalisation and globalisation in four focal areas:

- A. Comparative studies of *cultural policy and cultural production* at local, regional, national, and supranational levels, focusing on the interfaces between culture, politics, and economics. There are global trends for cultural factors to become more central in regional planning, trade, and the labour market, as well as in cultural production in the arts and the cultural industries, while official cultural politics still tends to be dictated on state level. This relates to the much-debated questions of how interdisciplinary work in the humanities and cultural research may find a new and stronger role in twenty-first-century societies.
- B. Another research area compares the meanings and usages of heritage in the Swedish and Australian contexts, including *uses of history and museums*. Historical references are central to collective identity formations, and museums, monuments, and other practices for (re)constructing history play a key role in shaping both culturalised and globalised understandings of each society. The institutionalised role of museums and exhibitions in the creation of collective memory – both national and transnational – is a key subject for contemporary cultural research.
- C. A third area concerns *tourism, mobility, space*. Tourism has a prominent globalising function and is also often seen as a key aspect of the expanding ‘experience’ or creative industries. This part of the project has dealt with how different forms of global mobility affect the cultural and social meaning of space and place.
- D. A fourth and related area concerns other forms of *media and popular culture*, such as shopping, sport, music, and youth cultures. These tend

to construct transcontinental links but also to develop in locally specific ways – for example through different forms of fandom and style.

Articles

The project ‘Culturalisation and Globalisation’ has brought two interdisciplinary centres for advanced cultural research in different hemispheres together to explore these perspectives on contemporary cultural processes and conditions. This work has, among other things, resulted in a number of articles that have either been presented at workshops or otherwise influenced by the exchange of ideas and experiences that the project has enabled. One set of such articles, focusing mainly on issues of globalisation, is to be published in the Australian edition of *Global Media Journal* (GMJ, www.commart.s.uws.edu.au/gmjau). In parallel, *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* is proud to present here another combination of articles, with cultural perspectives and processes of culturalisation as the main common theme.

A shared trait in these articles is that they all, in different ways, explore the relationship between particular cultural expressions and a general cultural order. This reflects much of the classical tension between Matthew Arnold’s definition of culture as ‘the best that has been thought and said’ (1869/2006) and Raymond William’s anthropological definition of culture as ‘a whole way of life’ (1981). This is a distinction that becomes more and more acute as processes of culturalisation push towards the latter by dispersing the concept of culture across a wide range of societal spheres while various mechanisms and institutions of cultural validation desperately seek to maintain or re-establish a cultural canon.

The concept of culture has a complex history, from its roots in a general understanding of human cultivation which can be described as an ontological concept of culture which increasingly divided existence into nature and culture, and was thus parallel to the sister concept of civilisation.¹ The nineteenth century gave rise to its bifurcation in Arnold’s aesthetic concept of culture on the one hand, with the fine arts at its core, and, on the other, the anthropological or sociological concept of culture as a life form as the main alternative. The former was seen as a universal achievement of humanity globally, though with the Western world as the vanguard, while the latter was pluralised in a variety of ‘cultures’ coexisting globally, each forming a full lifeworld of the people inhabiting it. Aesthetic culture thus tended to be universal but forming a separate sector of society, thus making culture distinct from civilisation, while anthropological cultures were instead differentiated globally but each including its members fully.

From the 1960s, a fourth main way of understanding culture has been developed by hermeneuticians, semioticians, social anthropologists, and cultural sociologists. This new hermeneutic concept of culture focuses on meaning-making or signifying practice, and it has had enormous influence on cultural studies and

cultural research as a highly productive founding concept adopted by, among others, Paul Ricoeur, Clifford Geertz, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams.² It manages to link the previous four concepts to each other and offer them a more tenable foundation in that, for instance, the aesthetic field can be seen as a haven for challenging and expanding signifying practices, while anthropological life forms are bound together by shared meanings.

This also means that culturalisation need not be interpreted in either an ontological, aesthetic or anthropological way – as an expansion of culture over nature; as the increasing importance of arts, entertainment, fiction, and design – or as a new emphasis on identity politics. On a deeper level, it may be seen as a growing and more reflexive understanding of how profoundly human existence is bound to practices of signification, meaning-making, and interpreting things, selves, others, and social relations.

The articles presented here, emanating from the collaboration between Australian and Swedish cultural researchers, in various ways reflect upon such processes, capturing some of the complex interactions between different levels, meanings, and concepts of culture. Not least, they all testify to the fruitfulness of a cultural perspective in trying to come to grips with the role of culture in the contemporary world.

The section opens with *Erling Bjurström's* article 'Whose Canon? Culturalisation versus Democratisation'. This is a study of the cultural construction of taste in the past and its effect on present debates. It looks at how the formations of cultural canons and the very idea of a high culture relate to the position of art in modern culture. Bjurström's article touches on the very core of cultural change since it studies how the attribution of aesthetic value to a limited body of consecrated works connects to the wider anthropological meaning of culture as a set of social norms and values. Firmly grounded in the aesthetic and philosophical history of creativity, it also relates the recent debates on publicly commissioned cultural canons to a longer intellectual tradition. Bjurström discusses how a 'cultural turn' took place in the eighteenth century, when art was disembedded from everyday life and transformed from a craft among others to an expression of an extraordinary creative imagination while culture became a new ground for collective national identities. At the other end of this process, he also demonstrates how the 'discourse on canons' recently has 'shifted its focus from processes of inclusion to those of exclusion' as the predominant understanding of culture has changed from a means to cultivate the people through a top-down dispersion of fine arts to a supposedly democratic arena for identity politics where the different factions of the people can claim their rights to be represented.

Bodil Axelsson's article 'History in Popular Magazines: Negotiating Masculinities, the Low of the Popular and the High of History' is a study of how the past is reproduced and recontextualised in the present. It analyses how the Swedish history magazine *Populär historia* integrates history into a landscape of late modern

consumerism where historical events are articulated as kaleidoscopic fragments of the past that are connected to different forms of consumptions. In that way, Axelsson shows how the historical narratives and images that previously served a similar role as the romantic notion of culture in the construction of national identities are disembedded from their nationalist past and re-embedded in a late modern consumptionscape where history is commodified and used to sell other media and tourist experiences. This is an example of how the past is being culturalised, not only in the sense that it is interpreted in relation to current cultural values and norms, but also because it becomes caught up in processes and conflicts that have an increasing influence on culture as culture invades other social spheres in late modernity. Consequently, Axelsson shows how these historical imaginaries are articulated in a field of cultural tensions between masculinity and femininity, high and low culture, fact and fiction, and education and entertainment.

Hilary Hongjin He's article "'Chineseness-es' outside Mainland China: Macao and Taiwan through Post-1997 Hong Kong Cinema' reflects on how place, space, and global relations are reflected through cultural practices. It focuses on a number of films made in Hong Kong and Macau after Hong Kong was transferred from the United Kingdom to China in 1997. If Axelsson discusses how historical images are disembedded from a context of nation-building, He can be said to depict a reverse shift where cultural commodities are drawn into a context of Chinese nation-building post 1997. The article deals with how film and popular culture embody different cultural and political identities that coexist within the vast and heterogeneous People's Republic of China, and conflicts between those identities are enacted in fictional narratives. In He's article, the connection between culture and politics comes to the fore. She shows how those two spheres are caught up in a mutual process of culturalisation and politicisation that becomes evident in how the political and constitutional reorganisation of Hong Kong and Macau in relation to mainland China affect the production and reception of popular cinema.

Hart Cohen's article 'Database Documentary: From *Authorship* to *Authoring* in Re-mediated/Remixed Documentary' studies the highly contemporary phenomenon of database documentaries. Cohen's purpose is twofold: on the one hand, the article serves as an empirical and theoretical introduction to how this new interactive documentary format – where the audience can navigate freely within an archive of mixed media content – is constituted within a contemporary media landscape. On the other hand, Cohen's article not only opens up a new and fascinating field of research, it also contributes to a deeper understanding of the genre of database documentary by relating it to the media landscape of the past decade, and particularly to the history of documentary film. The discussion about how database documentaries challenge fundamental cinematic concepts of authorship and creativity also touches on how the current changes in technology and media production are pushing towards a more key transformation of core values in the

cultural imaginary laid down over the last decades. In this sense, Cohen's text forms a good end point to this thematic section as it shows how some of the ideas of creativity and authorship discussed in Bjurström's article are renegotiated in a contemporary media context.

These four articles cut across a wide geographical, historical, and topical area, going from the seventeenth-century history of aesthetics and philosophy, via the uses of history in twentieth-century publishing and geopolitical aspects of Hong Kong film-making, to the relationship between new media and old cultural concepts. Taken together, these articles can be said to represent different dimensions of culturalisation in the age of globalisation. If He describes the cultural formulation of geographical and political space, then Axelsson's article explores the cultural construction of the past. Bjurström's and Cohen's texts, in their turn, discuss the formulation and reformulation of fundamental cultural concepts, such as aesthetics, creativity, and authorship.

Seven articles from the four-year exchange between Tema Q and CCR are simultaneously published in the Australian edition of *Global Media Journal*, volume 6, issue 1 (www.commarts.uws.edu.au/gmjau): Johan Fornäs, 'European Identification: Symbolic Mediations of Unity and Diversity'; Ann Werner, 'Emotions in Music Culture: Articulations of Love in Girls' Listening and Producing'; George McClean, 'SBS's Multilingual Dilemma: Global Media, "Community Languages" and Cultural Citizenship'; Glen Fuller, "'V8s' 'til '98": The V8 Engine, Australian Nationalism and Automobility'; Martin Fredriksson, 'Spaces of Piracy'; Hart Cohen, 'New Media and Populism'; and David Rowe & Stephanie Alice Baker, 'Live Sites in an Age of Media Reproduction: Mega Events and Transcontinental Experience in Public Space'.

These texts further expand the scope of the Swedish–Australian interaction, adding analyses slightly more focused on the theme of globalisation. Together, these two theme sections with, in all, eleven articles, published in collaboration between cultural researchers in opposite corners of the world (at Linköping University in Sweden and the University of Western Sydney in Australia), testify to the power of culture to make sense across the globe.

Johan Fornäs is editor-in-chief of *Culture Unbound*, professor at the Department of Media and Communication Studies at Södertörn University in South Stockholm, and director of ACSIS at Linköping University. With a background in musicology, he is a board member of the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and was between 2004 and 2008 vice-chair of the international Association for Cultural Studies.

Martin Fredriksson is executive editor of *Culture Unbound* and coordinator at ACSIS. He normally works at the Department of Culture Studies (Tema Q), Linköping University, but is currently a visiting scholar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he is conducting a study on copyright and pirate parties in North America. Starting in July 2012, he will be back at Linköping University to continue his work on piracy with a three-year project on the ideology of piracy.

Notes

- ¹ The following arguments largely derive from the Swedish book *Kultur* (2012), written by Johan Fornäs as a problematizing history and analysis of the concept of culture.
- ² Ricoeur (1965/1970), Geertz (1973), Hall (1997), and Williams (1981).

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Whose Canon? Culturalization versus Democratization

By Erling Bjurström

Abstract

Current accounts – and particularly the critique – of canon formation are primarily based on some form of identity politics. In the 20th century a representational model of social identities replaced cultivation as the primary means to democratize the canons of the fine arts. In a parallel development, the discourse on canons has shifted its focus from processes of inclusion to those of exclusion. This shift corresponds, on the one hand, to the construction of so-called alternative canons or counter-canons, and, on the other hand, to attempts to restore the authority of canons considered to be in a state of crisis or decaying. Regardless of the democratic stance of these efforts, the construction of alternatives or the reestablishment of decaying canons does not seem to achieve their aims, since they break with the explicit and implicit rules of canon formation. Politically motivated attempts to revise or restore a specific canon make the workings of canon formation too visible, transparent and calculated, thereby breaking the spell of its imaginary character. Retracing the history of the canonization of the fine arts reveals that it was originally tied to the disembedding of artists and artworks from social and worldly affairs, whereas debates about canons of the fine arts since the end of the 20th century are heavily dependent on their social, cultural and historical reembedding. The latter has the character of disenchantment, but has also fettered the canon debate in notions of “our” versus “their” culture. However, by emphasizing the dedifferentiation of contemporary processes of culturalization, the advancing canonization of popular culture seems to be able to break with identity politics that foster notions of “our” culture in the present thinking on canons, and push it in a more transgressive, syncretic or hybrid direction.

Keywords: Canon, canon formation, canons of fine art, canons of popular culture, culturalization, democratization, differentiation, dedifferentiation.

Whose Canon? Culturalization versus Democratization

Exploring the long and complex history of canonization is probably the best way to clarify some features of the present debate about the canon. Placed within the movements of modernity, the aesthetization of the concept of the canon in the 18th century and its politicization in the 20th century stand out as important historical changes that I will explore here. These changes are in many respects contradictory, particularly in the sense that the former rested on a disembedding of art and the artist from society and worldly affairs, whereas the latter is characterized by a contrary movement of reembedding. This shift has, I will argue, gone hand in hand with the shift from differentiation to dedifferentiation as an outcome of long-term processes of modern culturalization, processes that could be more fully understood through exploration. The dedifferentiation of culture, particularly from politics and economics, is at the heart of contemporary efforts to deconstruct or alter established canons, but, prompted by a sense of loss or decay, it has been met by efforts to authoritatively restore or reconstruct them.

Modern Canons and the Disembedding of Art

Canon debates oscillate between high and low tides. This was apparent in the second half of the 20th century, when the upholding of specific canons was challenged and questioned as part of what was generally conceived as the breakdown of established borders between high and low culture. In the 1980s and 1990s this challenge was met by a counter-reaction in the guise of a conservative defense of the Western literary canon (see, e.g., Bloom 1987; Bloom 1994). The basic counter-argument to this conservative reaction has been that the Western literary canon is based on unwarranted or illegitimate power relations, which has excluded writers on the basis of social criteria, such as gender or ethnicity. This argument, which still has a strong position in what otherwise seems like a fading contemporary canon debate, could fundamentally be regarded as a call for the democratization of canon formation. But it also reflects the shift in the focus of the discourse on canons from processes of inclusion to those of exclusion, the debate thus becoming pre-eminently a site for identity politics.

Although the call for democratization, in the sense just outlined, can be seen as a late 20th century feature of the canon debate, it is not the first time in history that democratic motives have played an important role in the revision or reconstruction of canons. For instance, this was the case when the vernacular European literary canons were established in the 18th and 19th centuries, breaking the spell of Latin as a universal superior language and thereby giving rise to both new literary canons and democratizing access to them for the reading public. There were also strong features of identity politics in the establishment of these vernacular literary canons in the guise of nationalist sentiments and the conceptualization of national

traditions. It is also noteworthy that what was later depicted as the Western canon grew out of the formation of different European literary canons and hence different languages and cultural settings. The conceptualization of a Western canon is of quite recent origin, emanating from the universal aesthetic claims that Kant made in the *Critique of Judgment* in 1790 and Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* (world literature) in the 1820s. It was, however, the 18th and 19th centuries that saw the formation of modern canons within the arts. In these centuries older canons based on Latin or Christian dogmas were reconstructed into vernacular or profane ones, at the same time as the concept of art was homogenized and restricted to the fine arts, in accordance with the notion of *les beaux arts* (the fine arts) established by Batteux in the 1740s.

However, the establishment of modern canons followed different paths and paces within different art forms. The pre-histories of the formation of these canons were also different. Whereas it is possible to place modern canon formation in painting and the plastic arts in the Renaissance and especially Giorgio Vasari's invention of art history with the publication of the first edition of *Le vite de piú eccellenti architetti, pittori et scultori* (The lives of the most eminent architects, painters and sculptors) in 1550, the modern literary canon formation grew out of *la querelle des anciens et des modernes* (the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns) in the late 17th century (see, e.g., Didi-Huberman 1990/2005; Kramnick 1998). By comparison, the formation of a profane modern musical canon is of later origin, although the Renaissance already gave rise to thoughts about music's independence from religious matters (cf. Goehr 2007:135p). However, the formation of a modern musical canon not only presupposed that music was adopted among the fine arts in the 18th century; it was also liberated from its dependence on words, and instrumental music was accepted as a pure form of art. In spite of these differences, there is no doubt that canon formation within different arts cross-fertilized or mutually supported one another. The creative power behind what Vasari named *disegno*, "drawing" or "design," was, for example, successively extended to art forms other than painting, sculpture and architecture and was seen as a distinctive mark of a new canonized nobility of art and genius. Likewise, canon formation within different arts rested on similar, although complex and far from transparent, legitimatizing procedures.

A consequence of modern canon formation within the arts was that a new canonized nobility of art was disembedded from social relations and societal affairs. This process, which culminated with the notion of *l'art pour l'art* (art for art's sake) in the 19th century, had its origins in the Renaissance with the uplifting of painting to a true *artes liberales* (liberal art), which liberated the artists from the guilds and separated them from servile craftsmen. It was completed by the sharp distinction between the fine arts and crafts in the 18th and 19th centuries, at the same time as the cult of the artist as genius peaked and was legitimated philosophically as a gift of nature by Kant and as a transcendent creative capacity by the

Romantics. As shown by Goehr (2007:205pp), these Kantian and Romantic notions played a crucial role in the formation of the modern “classical” canon of music and the change of the social status of composers in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century. The genius and god-like creative capacity attributed to canonized artists not only disembedded them from social concerns, but from time and space. Canonization was the primary means to save the artist and his (or in rare cases: her) work from social death or oblivion, making the artist and his work immortal. Disembedding the artist and his works from society, time and space was equivalent to de-contextualizing them – or placing them in an imaginary space above social concerns and time.

Analogous to the canonization practices in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church, this could be seen as a sanctification of the artist and his work, which presupposed a new outlook on aesthetics and art. Such an outlook had developed gradually since the Renaissance, but came to the forefront quite rapidly in the 18th century with the introduction of aesthetics as a new philosophical discipline and with the constitution of what Kristeller (1959) has termed “the modern system of the arts.” By means of these and other changes, art was liberated from and raised above its social and historical context. Consequently, the disembedding of art from social and historical matters spilled over to the canonized artists and their works. Elevated to a realm above social concerns and worldly affairs, creativity and its product, the work of art, took on a specific aesthetic significance that was intermingled with the genius attributed to canonized artists.

These changes were also profound with respect to the status and reception of art, which could be exemplified by the emerging conceptualizations of a specific aesthetic value and experience in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century. Assessments of aesthetic values worked as a counter force to the tendency of the expanding market to reduce noneconomic values to economic ones. Simultaneously, aesthetic experience took on a character of epiphany previously reserved for religious experiences (cf. Taylor 1989:419pp). The changes that fostered the formation of modern canons of art were, however, complex and far from transparent. This is reflected in the vast amount of terms that were coined and concepts that altered their meanings in the 18th and 19th centuries, and that still remain central in the discourse on art, esthetics and culture. In this sense, the formation of the modern literary and musical canon was even dependent on the alteration of the meaning of the concept of literature and music by which the former was confined to poetry and prose and the latter primarily to symphonic music (cf. Guillory 1993; Kramnick 1998; Goehr 2007, 2008).

The formation of modern canons within the arts in the 18th and 19th centuries was based on the emergence of aesthetics and a radical change in aesthetic attitude, but the realization and implementation were primarily dependent on processes of institutionalization. Such processes were anchored in the increasing public responsibility for art, literature, education and cultural matters, with the open-

ing of public schools, museums, libraries, theaters, concert halls and other cultural institutions. This embryonic state cultural policy – compared to what was to evolve in Europe in the 20th century – confirmed the otherwise more or less inscrutable processes of canon selection. To be adopted by or integrated in a cultural institution was one of the most evident signs of the canonization of artists and their works. Nevertheless, verdicts on canon selection were not revealed by these institutions, at least not explicitly, but rather remained in a state of inscrutability or ambiguity.

Canon Formation as Culturalization

It is primarily from an institutional angle that modern canon formation within the arts emerges as a process of culturalization. Historically, modern canon formation was contemporaneous and closely synchronized with the discernment of culture as a specific sphere of action, field of practice and societal sector. Obviously, what retrospectively can be termed “cultural institutions,” such as art academies, schools or salons, existed well before the 18th century, but it was not until this century that “culture” works as a kind of umbrella term that brings them together. To regard “culture” as a general term for the cultivation of humans or a product of their doings was not common until the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

This redefined conceptualization of culture was foremost marked by the constitution of the German *Bildung*-tradition in a way that fitted well with contemporary canon formation within the arts. In mid-19th century this was pointed out by Arnold (1867/2006:5) in his often cited description of culture as “a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world.” The fact that Arnold made no effort to determine what “the best” was in this respect provides a clue to his reliance on the on-going canon formation to do that work of discrimination for him. His emphasis on the “total perfection” of the human faculties by “the best which has been thought and said” articulates a prominent feature in the overall culturalization of the 18th and 19th centuries: the claim that culture possessed the power to develop and ennoble the human faculties towards perfection by the assimilation of great works of art or scholarship (cf. Thompson 1990:122pp). Cultivation and canonization were closely intertwined in this process of culturalization and gave it a basic hierarchical and stratified character, both culturally and socially.

This was, however, counteracted by other traits in the culturalization of the 18th and 19th centuries, for example, the growing notion of the differentiation of culture into specific cultures, both in time and space. Articulated foremost by German thinkers, and particularly Herder, each single culture in the plurality of cultures was given a monad-like character, although without contradicting notions of cultivation or refinement. The late 18th century historicization of culture in Ger-

many by the introduction of the concept *Kulturgeschichte* (history of culture) also indicates that the internal differentiation of the concept of culture was understood in terms of chronology.

As part of a complicated and far from unambiguous process of culturalization, the internal differentiation of culture in time and space both worked as a prerequisite for and a problem in the formation of canons within the arts in the 18th and 19th centuries. Closely connected to the extension of the power of the European nation-state, the internal differentiation of culture in space supported nationalist canon formations, whereas the corresponding differentiation in time was primarily seen as a problem to overcome: historical distance. The latter is an often overlooked force behind the claims for universal and eternal validity of the emerging modern canon formation of the 18th century. Nationalist canons were retroactively constructed as traditions, crossing historical gaps and in some cases redrawing historical national, social or cultural borders, while at the same time being oriented towards a common ideal or classical past, the antiquity of Greece and Rome. It was mainly the overcoming of the historical distance between this ancient past and the constitution of national European cultures that paved the way for the later conception of a Western canon. The canonical focus on works of art, including written texts and musical compositions, fostered a de-contextualization of them which dispelled their historical discontinuity and cultural heterogeneity. As shown by Kramnick (1998), the translation of classical antiquity to nationalist vernacular canons even included the invention of nationalist antiquities of a more recent past, frequently built on reevaluations of works of art previously honored or belittled.

To overcome the historical distance between the past and the present was, however, not the only problematic aspect of time in the formation of nationalist vernacular canons in the 18th and 19th centuries. When the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment and its trust in human development influenced thoughts on cultivation and cultural refinement, more attention was paid to the future prospects of canons and the importance of keeping them open to the work of contemporary and coming artists. Although it seems like questions of the future and the renewal of canons were seldom addressed directly, they were expressed in concerns about the prospects of canonical standards of taste by worried writers like Arnold (1867/2006:86), who, obviously not without hesitation, relied on the hope “of extinguishing the taste of the bathos implanted by nature itself in the soul of man.” A similar veiled discourse on canons was present in Hegelian notions of art’s impending or future death. However, it was not until the 20th century advent of modernism and subsequently postmodernism, that the future and renewal of the established modern canons of art became a more obvious and urgent problem.

It is of crucial importance for any canon to be open to the future, that is, to make room for new entries and thereby extend the row of canonized works or persons. This openness is put most severely to the test in times of radical changes in aesthetics and the arts, as was the case when modernism and more recently

postmodernism revolutionized the art world in the 20th century. Neither the works of modernism nor postmodernism accommodated themselves to the prevalent understanding of art and consequently brought with them comprehensive notions of discontinuity. To survive, canons need to repair or overcome such discontinuities or, in other words, to negotiate between the past and the present and in some way reconcile them. The renewal or survival of a canon in such a situation becomes a problem of coordinating the past with the present. However, it seems like normal canon procedure to retroactively unify or homogenize different or even disparate cultural phenomena into what emerges as a coherent tradition.

Retrospectively, the modern canons of art appear to have stood up to the test of both modernism and postmodernism. The work of representatives of both these art movements have been incorporated into what still seems like an unbroken canon of art, even though the canon discourse and debate have shifted focus quite radically. Although the status of canons within the arts has declined, they are still possible to discern. Hence, the 20th century renewal of modern canon formation that grew out of complex processes of culturalization in the 18th and 19th centuries at least seems a partial success. Nevertheless, today the canons of fine art circulate in quite different social, economic and cultural settings than two or three hundred years ago and are, likewise, surrounded by other kinds of culturalization processes.

Multidimensional Culturalization

Culturalization was neither a completely autonomous process nor the only one that affected the modern canon formation of the 18th and 19th centuries. If one, in a consciously anachronistic way, speaks of culturalization as a “cultural turn,” in these centuries, it becomes clear that the concept basically refers to a complex and elusive process whereby notions of culture changed the agenda of thinking, practices and social affairs in a general sense. In this respect, the culturalization that stood out in the 18th century can also be described as a cultural imaginary, comparable to the social imaginaries with traits of utopian schemes that Taylor (2004) argues paved the way for modernity and enabled people to imagine their doings, themselves and social life in new and meaningful ways. As a cultural imaginary it was, of course, related to and overlapped other important long-term processes of modernity, for instance, secularization and democratization. This is revealed by the close kinship between the concepts of civilization and culture in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century and the corresponding meanings of becoming “civilized” and “cultivated.” Likewise, the contrast between these concepts, pursued especially in the German-speaking parts of Europe, played a crucial role for the succeeding meanings attributed to culture in the 19th century and particularly for the development of descriptive anthropological conceptions of culture.

Even though the culturalization of the 18th and 19th centuries has many facets, its relationship to long-term processes of secularization and democratization seem particularly crucial from the angle of canon formation. Culturalization can be conceived as part of a long-term process of secularization, in the sense that notions of culture and art were dependent upon the dissolution or cessation of religious society, beliefs and practices. In many respects, culture and art took over when religion withdrew. This substitution of culture and art for religion was made into an explicit and enduring concern in the discourse on culture, especially by thinkers who, like Arnold (1867/2006) and Eliot (1948/1962), concerned themselves with the safe-guarding of canonical standards of taste.

Since the 18th century culturalization has had an overall hierarchical and stratified character, its relationship to processes of democratization was and has remained controversial and tense. By contributing to the stratification of society as well as to practices and artifacts, culturalization stood in an enduring problematic dialectic relationship to democracy and particularly strivings for increased equality. As a dominant trait of the culturalization of the 18th and 19th centuries, the differentiation between “cultivated” and “uncultivated” persons and social strata not only worked as an obstacle to overcome class antagonism, but also as a powerful tool for the imagination of the self, others and society. Primarily based on rising conceptions of civility and a new kind of humanist training, this facet of culturalization broke the order of the feudal nobility and the clergy and paved the way for a new bourgeois cultural elite that stressed the importance of cultural distinctions. Nevertheless, in an age of new opportunities for upward social mobility and economic upheaval, combined with class and political conflicts, culture was also rhetorically designated as a democratic and egalitarian force, not least by Arnold (1867/2006:53) who described “men of culture” as “the true apostles of equality” and proclaimed that a thorough cultivation of people would transcend political conflicts and class antagonism.

However, in the 19th century the consensus to pursue the democratic and egalitarian aims of culturalization as a downward movement, from top to bottom, seems to have been almost total among taste reformers and saviors of the canons within the arts (cf. Bjurström 2008). This downward movement was primarily legitimated by the threat of cultural leveling and its supposed effect on people. The threat remained a central part of the culturalization process till the second half of the 20th century, when the moral critique of mass culture was countered by more affirmative conceptions of popular culture, and the movement of postmodernism transgressed the established borders between high and low culture. These changes also affected and marked a shift in the canon debate. Based on culturalization processes that took off in other directions than previously, canons of fine art were now questioned as unwarranted saviors of the evaporating border between high and low culture. In the mid-1960s, Sontag (1965/2001:302) declared what was at stake when she described “the new sensibility,” which according to

her marked the “abandonment of the Matthew Arnold idea of culture” and would make the distinction between high and low culture “less and less meaningful.” A few years later, similar notions led to more explicit calls for the democratization of culture, most prominently by Gans (1974/1999:175) who spoke for cultural pluralism and the need for a general acceptance of “the specific standards of every taste public.” To combat cultural inequality and the placement of high culture above politics, Gans (1974/1999:131) also proposed a politicization of culture that would “make the political values of high culture (and popular culture) visible, force discussions of these values, and lead to criticism of culture as conservative or radical.”

From the viewpoint outlined here, Gans’ call for the politicization, democratization and equalization of culture in the mid-1970s could be read as an indication of more widespread tendencies to reembed high culture, including the fine arts and their canons, in political, social and historical contexts. Hence, there was also an effort to turn to the long-term culturalization processes emanating from the 18th and 19th centuries, by relating them to other processes crucial for the understanding and development of modernity.

While the culturalization tied to the emerging modernity of the 18th century was mainly a process of differentiation, the late 20th century reactions to it were characterized by dedifferentiation, particularly in the shape of postmodernism and the so-called creative industry or experience economy. Slightly more than twenty years ago, Lash (1990:11pp) conceptualized this dedifferentiation process by pointing at the blurring of the distinction between the cultural and the social in a broad sense, in combination with the loss of autonomy for cultural spheres, but he attributed these changes primarily to postmodernism. In doing so, Lash (1990:39pp) also pointed to the dedifferentiation of cultural economy, thereby contributing to the discourse on the cultural turn of economy in the late 20th century that is still continuing, in which the concept of culturalization is explicitly used, but in a quite restricted sense (see, e.g., Ray & Sayer 1999; Gay & Pryke 2002; Power & Scott 2004; Sum & Jessop 2005). As indicated by conceptions of the mutual economization of culture and culturalization of economy, this cultural turn is primarily conceived as a dedifferentiation of culture and economy, not as a more general or all-embracing shift to culture. It is, however, in accordance with most of the cultural turns proclaimed since the late 20th century in the sense that they are understood as a simultaneous shift to culture and loss of its autonomy. Culture is, from this point of view, infiltrated by numerous processes of late modernity, such as globalization, mediatization and digitalization, which affect and reorder its external as well as its internal borders. Evidently, culture could already be seen from the start as a crucial part of or intersected by such late modern processes. For example, mediatization is a process whereby culture becomes increasingly mediated and dependent upon communication media, and globalization implies the transformation of local, regional or national cultural settings. Hence, re-

lating culturalization to other processes of modernity, like democratization, secularization, mediatization or globalization, can be seen as a way to grasp its elusive movements. Likewise, the proposed long-term shift in the appearance of culturalization itself, in the transition from an early modern phase of differentiation to a late modern phase of dedifferentiation, should be regarded as a tentative approach to grasp its more general appearance.

Yet, it seems deceptive to solely regard late modern culturalization as a process of dedifferentiation. This is indicated not least by the contemporary status of and discourse on canons. Certainly, notions of the contemporary irrelevance of the canons within the fine arts or claims for opening them to putatively lower forms of art support general views of the dedifferentiation of high and low culture, but they could hardly be attributed to the canons themselves. Canons that are open to mixing or that actually mix high and low standards are still rare. Nevertheless, political, social, economic and technological changes contribute to generate contemporary constructions of so-called alternative canons or counter-canons.

In light of the long-term formation of the canons of fine art and their adjustment to more or less revolutionary changes in the arts, they have been exposed to and affected by complex and changing processes of culturalization. The formation of the modern canons of fine arts dates back to the time when culture acquired its original autonomy by the completion of the transformation of the Latin derivative *cultura* from referring to the cultivation of crops to the cultivation of the mind and the constitution of culture as a cognitive category, action sphere and institutionalized entity. In this respect, modern canon formation rests on and seems to stand and fall with some of the basic constituents of a multidimensional culturalization, which among other things comprised the differentiation of culture from nature and the emergence of culture as a cognitive explanatory category for understanding people's ways of thinking, their actions and behavior and hence as a tool for self-reflection. The culturalization that had its origins in the 18th century and can be regarded as a constituent of modernity was the result of the mutual interaction of what emerged as ontological, anthropological, institutional, aesthetic and hermeneutic dimensions of culture (cf. Fornäs et al. 2007). However, it was mainly the institutional, aesthetic and hermeneutic dimension of this process that had bearing on the parallel formation of canons within the fine arts.

Canon formation was a crucial prerequisite for the constitution of cultural institutions, such as public schools and museums. Furthermore, as pointed out by Guillory (1993:31) every construction of a syllabus, display of works of art or similar selective pursuits of cultural institutions "*institute* once again the process of canon formation." Correspondingly, the constitution of a specific aesthetic attitude in combination with the upheaval of art above social or worldly concerns was a prerequisite for making canon formation within the fine arts of particular significance. Moreover, this canon formation was dependent on changing cognitive outlooks and hermeneutic procedures in the reception and interpretation of art.

Together, these changes not only served to elevate works of art above worldly affairs and to constitute the autonomy of art, but they also made processes of canon formation more or less inscrutable, having the appearance of being constructed by an invisible hand.

The Social Reembedding of Canons

From the start, modern canon formations of the fine arts arose as imaginary entities or phenomena. This imaginary character of canons was radically reinforced when they were secularized by the fine arts and emancipated from the church and religious practices. While the Christian canon of scripture, which had already evolved in the 2nd century is in many respects comparable to a modern literary canon, it comprised a complete and uncontested list of biblical texts; the modern canons of fine art, on the other hand, had – and still have – the appearance of imaginary entities or totalities. As such, they could be contested each time they were listed with claims of completeness or consensual selection. In the Roman Catholic Church, however, verdicts of canonization were embedded in a legal system, the so-called canon law, and were officially proclaimed. The Christian canon of sacred scripture was fundamentally closed, in contrast to the canons of fine art, which were – and still are – open to new entries as well as expulsions.

This also marked a turning point in the meaning of the word “canon.” The word has had multiple meanings since antiquity, basically referring to “pipe,” but also “rule,” “list,” “measuring rod” and “model.” Christian canonicity was deeply rooted in the meanings of “rule” and “list,” while the secular and aesthetic use of the word, which originated in the 18th century, primarily referred to “measuring rod,” “model” or “exemplary” (cf. Thomsen 2010, Olsson 2011).

Just as no one can grasp or have access to the canons of fine art in their entirety, recognizing or knowing them is always imbued by uncertainty or doubt and in the end left to personal or subjective judgments. In this respect, a listing of canonical works, in, for instance, a syllabus, can only be seen as a more or less adequate representation of a canon or an indicator of its imaginary totality (cf. Guillory 1993; Goehr 2007). Correspondingly, the distinction between overthrowing the evaluative principles of a canon and revising it is far from unambiguous. In addition, the imaginary character of a canon could underpin uncertainty on its status or even sheer existence.

Uncertainties on the status of the canons of fine art seem common today, as indicated by calls for the saving, restoration or reestablishment of the Western canon or national canons. Simultaneously, the canon debate seems less urgent and intense than at the end of the 20th century, which could be read as a sign of the lessening importance of canons in general and the canons of fine art in particular. Likewise, the need to implement the latter seems of less general importance than before, particularly in the agendas set by national European cultural policies from

the end of the 20th century. Up to at least the 1970s most of these agendas were built on efforts to democratize the access to the canons of fine art by giving as many people as possible the opportunity to acquaint themselves with high culture and supply them with the necessary means to appreciate it. This was mainly a matter of democratizing the canons of fine art from top to bottom, giving people the opportunity to reach up to and appreciate high culture without lowering its standards or popularizing it. These agendas were built on and followed the old order of cultivation and especially the German *Bildung*-tradition, although in most cases with more pronounced democratic aims and the support of popular education or cultivation movements, that since the 19th century have pursued the conquest of high culture from below by cultivating people to high cultural standards.

The agenda of cultivating people to high culture had a dual or ambiguous democratic character. Anchored in state policies as well as popular movements, cultivation could be seen as a step towards democracy both from above and below. This strengthened the justification of cultivation enterprises, but did not tackle the fact that the popularization and diffusion of high culture threatened to turn it into *gesunkenes Kulturgut*. In accordance with the so-called trickle-down theory, cultivation became something of a Sisyphean task that counteracted social and cultural equalization, since the upper social classes tended to desert the parts of high culture that became appreciated by the masses and thereby endlessly redefined high cultural standards, making them unattainable to lower classes.

Nevertheless, the processes by which culture trickled down did not seem to significantly affect or alter the continuing formation of fine art canons in the 19th and 20th centuries. Yet, the closer one gets to the present, the less is left of the prior efforts to cultivate people to the standards of high culture. The effort to democratize the canons of fine art has undergone a fundamental change: cultivation has, in brief, been overtaken by representation as the highway to the democratization of culture. Implementation in terms of cultivation or self-cultivation is no longer the primary concern of efforts to democratize canons, but rather identity politics in terms of who has constructed the canons and who is represented by them. It is telling that the question, “Whose canon is it?”, tends to appear as primary in any contemporary discourse on the status of canons.

The shift from cultivation to identity politics has also brought with it supplementary changes in the discourse on canons. This is indicated by the displacement of focus within the canon discourse itself, from the works of art to the artists or, in other words, from works to persons. The distinction between works and persons has always been blurred in canonization processes, but the emphasis has successively been transferred from work to person with the intrusion of identity politics at least in the sense that the representation of social identities seems to have become more important than what works of art represent. Correspondingly, there seems to be a displacement of democratic concern, from broadening the access to a specific canon to altering its social and cultural representation.

The shift to a kind of democratic representational canon politics has also contributed to the plurality of canon formations, regardless of the high-low cultural divide. This has occurred primarily in an intermediated way through the justification of the formation of genre specific canons within popular culture. This is in contrast to the construction of most so-called alternative canons and affirms the spontaneous character and complexity of canon formations. When consciously constructed, a canon does not seem to work, whether the intention to do so could be seen as democratic or undemocratic or coming from above or below. Without the workings of a more or less invisible canonical infrastructure, such a canon construction becomes too visible and too much a completed list that is difficult to keep alive and open to new entries. Hence, the spontaneity and complexity that canon formations seem to require may work as a serious obstacle to the consciously intended construction of a democratic representational canon based on identity politics.

The diversity of genre specific canon formations of popular culture – or what might be labeled minor canons, in comparison to the major canons of fine art – seems more like the outcome of dedifferentiating processes of contemporary culturalization than recent shifts in the canon discourse. Such minor canon formations have played a crucial role in the rising acceptance and status of popular culture in the late 20th century. Besides, canon formation from below, in terms of the high-low distinction, seems to contradict some features that have paved the way for undermining the canons of fine art, such as the questioning of the romantic cult of the artist as genius. While the cult of the artist as genius thrives with the formation of popular canons, it is declining and becoming the object of deconstruction in the sphere of high culture and the canons of fine art. The latter can be comprehended as part of Benjamin's famous diagnosis of the loss of art's aura, in the sense that the demise of the genius of the creator of fine art reduces art's potential or factual cult value. But as Benjamin (1936/1999:219) writes, "cult value does not give way without resistance" and tends, in ways he did not anticipate, to become retrenched and flourish in settings of popular culture. This has developed into a paradoxical contemporary situation, where the aura of fine art is still declining, while the aura of popular culture is rising. However, to regard this as a strict transmission of aura from high to popular culture does not seem right, since the cult value of the former and the latter rests on different premises, attitudes, infrastructures and, not least, forms of reception. Rather, as revealed by, for instance, a comparison of the contemporary celebrity cult and the cult of the artist as genius deriving from the Romantics, the auratic features of popular and high culture descend from different, though in some cases overlapping or collateral sources. Resting mainly on the attention of the media or what Franck (1998) has characterized as a more comprehensive economy of attention, the contemporary celebrity cult is quite immune to the demise of the aura of genius that contributes to the disenchantment with fine art and its canon.

However, the reembedding of fine art canons in social, cultural and historical contexts seems to be the main driving force behind their disenchantment and loss of aura. Historically, this reembedding not only breaks with the social disembedding of the modern canons of fine art that became evident in the 18th and 19th centuries, but challenges or rejects their claim of universality and eternal validity. A canonized art work's ability to stand the test of time or gain global reverence does not completely refute such challenges, since it is always doubtful whether the work's universal character is maintained by its aesthetic qualities or some other kind of power. Likewise, it is hard to deny that all generalizations or claims to universality in terms of aesthetics or art in a fundamental way are bound to historical times and social contexts.

Nevertheless, refutations of universal claims that rest on identity politics and the reembedding of canons in terms of social identities have an equivocal character. The main reason for this is that social identities are social and historical constructions. Hence, they are not fixed or stable and in many ways are incommensurable over time. Just as canons make up imaginary cultural continuities, the extension of social identities over a century or several centuries has an imaginary character. Canons are built on intertextual dialogue in a broad sense, and some identities are more fixed or stable over time than others, but as historical or rather trans-historical entities, they are always the products of retroactively unifying or homogenizing processes. In this respect, one could even say that the critique of the Western canon of fine arts based on identity politics does itself a disservice, since it tends to disguise the complexity of social identities, social and cultural settings, aesthetic idioms and languages lumped together under the umbrella term "Western." The term "Western" is, both literally and metaphorically, in need of a translation of historical facts to the present to work as a more or less specious entity of canon or social identity. To comprehend an unbroken Western literary canon, originating from Greece antiquity of the 5th century BC, as Bloom (1994) does, presupposes the translation and incorporation of classic texts into different vernacular contexts. It was not possible to conceive the term as representing a more or less homogeneous culture, civilization or political unit until the 20th century with the rise of the United States as a political super power and the emergence of a post-colonial situation. Of course, such an understanding of Western civilization is reasonable in terms of a global political and economic order, but it seems like a misconceived conception of a literary canon, not least in the sense that it is problematic to regard canonized writers like Shakespeare, Joyce or Beckett as defenders of that civilization or world order.

Democratizing or Authoritatively Restoring?

Whether one defends or criticizes the Western canon, it seems a misconception to relate it to a coherent social identity or a unity of works of art. There is no direct

or uncomplicated way in which canons represent social identities, although the construction of so-called alternative canons, mostly based on gender, the minority status of ethnic subcultures or multiculturalism, might give the contrary impression. Naturally, the latter canons could justifiably raise the self-esteem and cultural consciousness of subordinated social categories or groups, but they mainly seem to work as politically motivated alternatives to more established or recognized canons. Even though institutionalized in some cases as part of an agenda of gender equality or multiculturalism and lacking the real means of canon formation, they tend to be stuck in the position of a subordinated canon or are not being recognized as “real” canons. Moreover, by confining themselves to a specific social identity, they close themselves to trans-cultural influences, in a way that contradicts the transgressive, syncretic or hybrid character of much of contemporary culture and art. In this respect they come close to the contrary pole of the contemporary politicization of canons, represented by nationalist and populist political parties and movements.

The idea that canons represent social categories or groups, either dominant or dominated, has been a strong impetus behind the contemporary politicization of canons. The question, “Whose canon is it?”, has become the common ground for the political use and critique of canon formations as well as efforts to change, destroy, restore or save them. Hence, this question is at the heart of strivings to democratize as well as to restore or save the authority of canons. Moreover, as pointed out by Guillory (1993:28), behind this lurks a conspiracy theory on canons, whereby they are seen as products of the decisions of a dominant social group aimed to exclude representatives of other groups.

Nothing perhaps indicates more strongly the complexity of canon formations than the fact that there is no general or single criterion that could explain the attainment or lack of canonical status. This is not to say that social identity has got nothing to do with the formation of a canon, but that it is not the only and in most cases not even the prime factor behind an artist’s success or failure to attain canonical status. Neither does this mean that canon formation is a perfectly democratic, fair or equal enterprise. Quite the contrary, such formation does not constitute an exception from social affairs in general and consequently must be considered to reproduce power relations, inequality and other features of social life (cf. Guillory 1993). Canons are and have always been socially embedded, which makes the late 20th century social reembedding of them a disenchanting democratic enterprise. However, emanating from notions of a crisis in the contemporary canon formation or even a lack of a recognizable canon per se, contrary political measures have also been taken to counter this reembedding by restoring the authority of canons, foremost to support nationalist agendas.

The politically motivated canon restoration is different from the one pursued by those, who like Bloom (1994:33pp), try to save the high cultural canons of fine art and resist any attempt to politicize and reembed them socially, culturally or

historically. As shown by Lykkeberg (2009), the confluence of arguments for canon restoration and charges of cultural elitism justified the construction of the official Danish canon, a dubious populist political enterprise, serving the purpose of securing and strengthening Danish national identity. But even if one disregards its populist character, the status of the Danish cultural canon seems uncertain, especially in terms of acceptance, which has been rather reluctant, to say the least. The enumeration of ninety-six cultural works and artifacts that were selected by expert committees and presented as the Danish cultural canon in 2006 still appears as a list, not as a canon in a proper sense.

The main reason behind the reluctance to accept the Danish canon as a canon is probably not the controversial selection of works and artifacts it is based on, but rather that its construction breaks with the explicit and implicit rules of canon formation. Contrary to what seems to comprise proper canon formation, the explicit and politically motivated construction of a canon becomes, in brief, too visible, too transparent and too much of a claim for or critique of power. Without the support of the means of proper canon formation, it is too obvious who it is who has constructed the canon, and hence provides an answer to the question, "Whose canon is it?". Thus, efforts to democratize, save or restore a canon tend to strengthen notions of canonization as a battle field of identity politics, making it more controversial.

It remains to be seen if the turn to identity politics will substantially alter the processes of canon formation or merely appear as a historically specific moment in their development. Nevertheless, the advancing canon formation within different genres of popular culture, which could hardly be attributed to specific social categories or groups, whether singled out as scholars, critics or fans, gives evidence to the spontaneous character of canonization and its more or less inevitable emergence and progression. Of course, the future prospects for this canonization of popular culture is also dependent on its institutionalization, including its implementation in schools, museums, award arrangements or criticism, but it nevertheless provides important clues to the workings of canon formation in general. This canonization is characterized by the same controversial problems of canon inclusion and exclusion that have dominated the debate on the high cultural canons of fine art since the late 20th century. Exclusions from popular culture canons are no more than those of the canons of fine art based on consciously or actively pursued decisions, but rather the result of the confined and unequal access to cultural works and the means of cultural production and consumption (cf. Guillory 1993). Representatives of subordinated social categories or groups are filtered out before they become subjects of canonization. However, the canonization of popular culture has a more democratic character than in the fine arts, since it is less confined by the possession and accumulation of cultural capital.

On the other hand, popular culture canons are still subordinated to the canons of the fine arts, not least because they lack the institutional support and breadth of

the latter. Notwithstanding, it cannot be ruled out that the emergence of canons of popular culture marks the beginning of the end of the fine arts canonical hegemony, analogous to the way the rise of vernacular canons in the early 18th century dethroned and altered the status of the religiously based Latin canon. One thing that speaks in favor of such a development is the fact that the contemporary social and historical reembedding of canons does not seem as threatening to the canons of popular culture as to those of the fine arts, since the former have not gone through a similar phase of disembedding. The dedifferentiation of contemporary processes of culturalization seems to point in the same direction and even speaks in favor of the mixing or joining of high and popular cultural canons. At any rate, a mixture is not unlikely if one considers that the canons of fine art once were contenders for canonical status and gained their positions through a long and complicated historical process. Moreover, this history reminds one of the fact that the canons of fine arts have not been completely closed to the incorporation of popular genres, as evidenced by the canonization of the novel in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Even though the canon debate and critique does not seem as intense at present as in the 1990s, it is unlikely that processes of canonization are becoming less significant or will evaporate in the future. Such a scenario might seem credible from a conservative high cultural point of view, but is contradicted by the emerging visibility of the canonization of popular culture genres. This emerging visibility will presumably change rather than destroy canonization, maybe making it less significant, but it will probably also alter, although not abolish, the tension between culturalization and democratization. Through its dependence on the dedifferentiation processes of contemporary culturalization, the canonization of popular culture has the potential to break with the identity politics that fosters notions of “our” culture in the present thinking on canons and push it in a more transgressive, syncretic or hybrid direction.

Erling Bjurström is Professor in cultural production and cultural politics at the Department of Culture Studies, Linköping University, Sweden. He is the author of more than twenty books on different subjects, mainly within the fields of culture, media and advertising. Among his latest publications are the Danish volume *Nye kulturstudier: Teorier og temaer* (2010), co-written with Anne Scott Sørensen, Ole Martin Høystad and Halvard Vike.

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History in Popular Magazines: Negotiating Masculinities, the Low of the Popular and the High of History

By Bodil Axelsson

Abstract

This article explores how the low of the popular and the high of history intersect to negotiate masculinities in the nexus of politics and war in a Swedish history magazine. It investigates the content of the magazine's form and argues that it produces a kaleidoscopic take on the past which begs the reader to go along with the ads to buy another book, travel to one more historical site, buy a DVD or go to the movies, to turn the page, or to buy another issue of the magazine. Two articles, biographical in their outset, provide the basis for an analysis on how masculinities are negotiated by displaying political and military leaders in contradictory ways and enabling multiple entrance points for the contemporary reader and spectator. Articles on great men produce cultural imaginaries of warlords and political leaders by drawing on layers of historically contingent ways for men to act in public and private spheres and connecting late modern visual celebrity culture to the cults of fame in earlier centuries.

Keywords: History magazines, popular culture, popular history, masculinities, cultural imaginaries, celebrity culture, the content of the form.

History in Popular Magazines: Negotiating Masculinities, the Low of the Popular and the High of History

Celebrities, stylish interior designs, glamorous women, laddish men, brand new technology, scientific discoveries, and exotic places. These days, well-stocked newsagents proudly display a plethora of glossy magazines. Digital technology has made magazines relatively inexpensive to print and ready-to-use generic formats are easy to copy. The glossy, thick paper of magazines suits images well and offers consumers as well as advertisers a sense of luxury (Alström & Hedman 2008). In Sweden alone, six hundred new titles were launched between 1995 and 2005 (Antoni 2007: 105).

This article deals with one segment of the magazine market, history magazines, and more specifically only one of the magazines available on this particular topic. Launched in 1991, *Populär Historia*, soon became the flagship of a mini media empire dependent on history for its primary subject matter. At its peak, the media company included two publishing houses, an Internet shop for books, DVDs, collaboration with a travel company and four magazines. Over the course of time, several new titles on the subject matter of history entered the newsagent's shelves, and *Populär Historia* was singled out as the qualitative and educational alternative to historical magazines with more popular addresses. Before *Populär Historia* was sold off to a competing company, its owners launched three new titles, one with an even more popular address, and two specialized in military history and biography respectively, giving evidence to the notion of an increasingly fractured and differentiated magazine market, on which new titles tend to address smaller and smaller segments of topics, audiences and advertisers (Sundin 2009: 11).

In this article, two biographies of great leaders will provide the base for an exploration of how the nexus of masculinity, power and war is negotiated in *Populär Historia*. This nexus is at the heart of the magazine's representation of the past (Sjöland 2011: 61ff). Here it is embedded in a discussion on the effect of the medium, how the soberness of the subject matter of academic history is negotiated. A magazine is visual in its appearance and its form links to leisure. It encourages browsing and spectatorship. It is glossy and associates to a spectacular popular culture in which different genres and titles address different communities of consumption based on social formations such as gender, class and generation. Like popular culture in general, magazines negotiate situated and contingent scripts for femininity and masculinity (Hermes 2005; Melman 2006).

This article follows in the footsteps of those cultural studies and media scholars who have cast magazines as sites for the construction and negotiation of femininities and masculinities in relation to practices of consumption (Winship 1987; McCracken 1992; Hermes 1995; Nixon 1997; Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks 2001; Benwell 2003; Crewe 2003). Even though postmodern and poststructuralist theory and practice have destabilised and deconstructed binary oppositions such

as masculinity/femininity, public/private, reason/emotion, and high/low, this article will argue that these pairs are still useful for understanding the ways in which masculinities are negotiated in *Populär Historia*. Masculinities are, in this article, approached as social and cultural constructions manifest in discursive and material forms as well as in the lived experiences of actual people. This article especially regards masculinities in relation to those interlinking images, motifs and narrative themes that make up cultural imaginaries. Cultural imaginaries here refer to public forms shaping the fantasies of real men and women (Dawson 1994). The approach seeks to recognise the differences within genders as well as in the possible constructions of masculinities, and femininities. It recognises that masculinities and femininities are conceptualised as a set of ideal types, realised in enactments of actual men and women (Paechter 2006). These ideal types are expressed in cultural imaginaries given material form in, for example, print media (Dawson 1994). Furthermore, the approach strives to acknowledge the potential contradictions in the nexus of masculinities, power and war, recognizing layerings and complexities, thus incorporating recent reformulations of the theory on hegemonic masculinities (Connell 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Seidler Jeleniewski 2007).

The Effect of the Medium

This essay is based upon a close reading of two articles in *Popular Historia's* annual volume from 2007. These articles contain within them aspects that are common in many other articles with similar topics that the journal has published over the years. The reading of the articles is embedded in an analysis of the ways in which the form of the magazine implies a culturalisation of the subject matter of history. The notion of culturalisation directs attention to the ways in which aesthetics, entertainment, media and fiction pervade more and more societal sectors and practices. Often, the result is blurred distinctions between previously separated areas (Fornäs et al. 2007a).

The exploration undertaken in this article on the culturalisation of history relies upon a browsing and reading of all annual volumes, initially intending for a mapping of themes and narratives in *Populär Historia*. However, during the course of the analysis I was somehow overpowered by the sheer amount of stories and images and instead decided to allow this impression of mine to be the starting point for an exploration into the format and how it affects the subject matter of history. This move causes this article to sidestep one of the most significant analytical traits in studies in the uses of history. It does consider the magazine's narratives, but does not aim at a systematic overview. Narratives have, in recent decades, turned into the preferred analytical tool in studies on historical representation and how humans relate to past times (Ricœur 1984; 1985; 1988; White 1987; Aronsson 2004; Rösen 2004). As suggested by Hayden White, the meaning of a nar-

rative lies as much in its given discursive form, as in its subject matter. How the past is presented, matters as much as the course of events being presented (White 1987). This article takes the 'content of the form' thesis of Hayden White beyond narrative tropes in order to take a sweeping approach to how history is given expressive and material form in one particular media form, the magazine. It will be argued that magazines produce an impression of a multitude of narratives, presenting the past as through a kaleidoscope. It is the implications of the kaleidoscope that interest me rather than a mapping of the narratives.

Tailoring the Magazine for a Specific Set of Readers

The format has an impact on how the past is displayed in magazines. It also impacts the reception of the magazine and what knowledge the media company sets out to acquire about potential readers. Knowledge about audiences is crucial to the success of media companies and statistics are an important tool to produce that knowledge (Ang 1996). According to figures from *Orvesto*, a company dedicated to market surveys, *Populär Historia* had 60-80 percent male readers in 2007. Their readers are evenly spread in the ages between 15 and 79 (ORVESTO Konsument 2007). All in all, they had an audience that was comprised of around 150 000 readers (Bergsten 2007).

More specific information on *Populär Historia's* readers is presented in a brochure selling the readers to advertisers. Here it is stated that *Populär Historia* covers a variety of topics in order to allure a large group of highly educated, curious and influential people. The readers have leading positions in the private, as well as the public sector, and are often active in voluntary associations. The brochure continues: the magazine is available in libraries, trains, airports, and in the waiting-rooms of medical doctors and at hairdressers. Here it is stated that the readers are evenly distributed between the ages of 25 and 64, and sixty percent are male. The target group has a university education and the majority live in households with substantial incomes (Annoninformation 2009).

One can clearly see that it is the affluent and educated middle class that constitutes the prime target readers. The young readers, who might read the magazine in their history lessons at school as well as retired people, are excluded. Instead, the focus is on men with careers and money to spend. It is inferred that the magazine is used to pass time while waiting for an appointment or on a journey. By not explicitly mentioning their female readers, the brochure connects to discourses linking male bodies and masculinities to the subject matter of history. The connection between, on the one hand, male audiences and, on the other hand, military and political history seems to be particularly strong (Rosenzweig & Thelen 1998: 30, 264; Ludvigsson 2003: 80; Jordanova 2006: 176).

In an article from a Swedish newspaper some years ago, *Populär Historia's* chief editor and the head of the publishing house jointly stated that they created

the magazine for people like themselves, a general public with an interest in history. They constituted their own target audience and made use of their experiences from business journalism and museum photography respectively. Addressing a recurrent critique of the magazine for being conspicuously male in its outset, focusing on kings and war, Erik Oswalds and Björn Andersson state that they strive to accomplish a balance in their choice of topics (Rubin 1999).

A similar rhetoric returns almost ten years later when the publishing house gave an interview on another of its magazines, *Allt om Historia*:

- we are trying to provide a mix that attracts both men and women, and those that have a special interest in history as well as those that one day may buy *Allt om Historia*, and the next buy *Fiskejournalen* or *Amelia*, explains Åke Persson, editor of *Allt om Historia*. There is no magic formula, but we are aiming at a mixture of the soft and the hard. - And, there has to be a war. (Chukri 2004; author's translation)

This citation situates the magazine in relation to other magazines currently for sale and casts the history magazine as an option amongst other magazines. The consumer might as well buy a magazine dedicated to fishing, a masculine coded leisure interest, or a lifestyle magazine targeted at women. It displays how the producers implicitly rely on a gender division when targeting their magazine's audience. Men and women are supposed to have different interests. Drawing on stereotyped ideals of femininity and masculinity, it is suggested that their interests might be conceptualized as soft and hard respectively. The citation also suggests that the producers are actively trying to deal with the critique of their products being too masculine in their outset, at the same time as they surrender to what they comprehend as a demand for articles on wars. Finally, the citation points to a paradox produced by an increasingly competitive market for popular magazines. The scope of popular magazines has to be at once broad and particular, attracting as many as possible to take interest in a special interest area (Hirdman 2001).

History in Popular Culture

The history magazine is one of many contemporary media formats that accentuate the ways in which consumption practices shape how the past is represented (de Groot 2009; Sjöland 2011). The subject matter of history is often associated with the written word and institutions such as the university, schools and education in public service media or popular movements. However, there is also a long trajectory of what Maurice Samuels labels as a 'spectacularization of the historical imagination', that is representations of the past dominated by conspicuously commodified images (Samuels 2004: 17). In her book on the culture of history in England 1800-1953, Billie Melman calls attention to a paradox of the period she studies; increased literacy was paralleled by an expansion of visual media such as exhibitions, dioramas, panopticons, theatre and opera performances, and later film (Melman 2006: 318). As we will see, this paradox is still alive.

Today, critics would say that history is on the verge of being consumed by popular culture. University trained historians are not the only ones to claim expertise (Winter 2006: 6; Aronsson 2011: 20). Journalists and amateurs write history and their audiences are heterogeneous (Jordanova 2006: 134-135; de Groot 2009). Addressing the issue of popular history, Ludmila Jordanova suggests it is history designed to attract many people and that it is included in the broader and more diverse phenomena of public history. Public history accentuates that the past is open-ended and available for a number of uses (Jordanova 2006: 126-136).

The recent wave of history in popular culture cannot be separated from what Jay Winter labels the twentieth-century 'memory boom'. The ubiquitous use of the past is almost over-determined in the sense that no single decisive cause can be decided. Historical remembrance is nurtured by many broad political and economic trends. In the context of this article, the development of broad strata of affluent and well-educated people is especially poignant, since *Populär Historia* address audiences within these segments. One of the most significant factors, pointed out by Winter however, is the commemorations of the two world wars. A vast number of people were personally involved in, or have relatives affected by, the wars. The lived memories of the wars entangle with commemorations as well as with history and media representations (Winter 2006).

In his mapping of history in contemporary popular culture, Jerome de Groot (2009) reports on a multiple, multiplying and unstable set of representational practices and sensory activities in a wide span of media formats, from celebrity historians in print and broadcast media, to documentaries, costume dramas, re-enactments, genealogy, digital archives and community websites. Following in the footsteps of cultural studies and new media research, de Groot emphasis digital media's interactivity. He thus casts the consumer as involved, connected and productive and he points to the interplay between commodity culture and educational leisure activities. This move enables him to sidestep the century long debate on whether popular culture pacifies its audiences or not and it places him in the circle of 'cultural populists', celebrating popular culture (McGuigan 1992).

History in popular culture has had its share of critics, standing in the opposite corner of de Groot. There are plenty of professional historians who are concerned about the lack of cognitive and scholarly value in history shaped for mass audiences and produced with the interest of profit (Ludvigsson 2003, forthcoming). Roy Rosenzweig (2006: 140-144), embracing popular uses of the past himself, has directed attention to the ways in which amateur and popular history take interest in vivid details, facts and personal interest stories rather than the broader pictures. Simon Schama, also a proponent of visual history has pointed to the ways in which television history, spectacular and colourful rather than sober and text-based, trouble academic historians (Schama 2004).

The possibility of outlining the two positions of the embracer and the critic connects history in popular culture to the high/low divide in culture. The popular

has, for a long time, been associated with mass media, consumer culture, and inferior cultural products appreciated by many people. In some instances popular culture refers to the (traditional) culture of the common people (Storey 1993). Another influential approach to popular culture connects it to a struggle over hegemony in everyday life (Fiske 1989).

The term popular history often connects to the definition of popular culture as mass mediated and commercial culture, and the Wikipedia entry on the term underlines that its meaning is defined in contrast to academic history (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_history, last accessed 2011.09.21). History, without the epithet popular, on the other hand, refers, in its widest sense, to events in the past and how they are given expressive and material form. As accentuated above, the practices in which history is studied is strongly associated to institutions with educational aims such as universities (Eriksen 1999: 13; Jordanova 2006: 13; Edquist 2009: 18). Approaching history on a conceptual level, Peter Aronsson suggests that history might be defined as an arena for negotiations on the what, and why of the subject matter, for which audiences and with what aims. The fact that the past cannot be re-lived, but has to be re-told, opens up a space for the consideration of representations, as do the strong connections between the writing of history and claims to power (Aronsson 2011). In Sweden, negotiations around popular forms of history have a background in twentieth century discourses within circles of popular education. Voices here were raised against the dry and sombre tone in academic history. Modes of addresses from fiction, such as the thrill of a good story, empathy and intuition were presented as positive antidotes to academic history (Edquist 2009: 69-71, 186). And conversely, academics take interest in establishing borders to popular history books and historical novels (Ludvigsson forthcoming). The following paragraphs will connect these negotiations to the gendering of popular culture and academic history in the nineteenth century when the low of the popular and the high of history was established.

The Gendering of Popular Culture and History

According to a modernist outset, no longer in place in its entirety, but part of an implicit, naturalised consensus, popular culture is associated to the domain of the feminine (Hermes 2005: 137). In the field of literature, this modernist chain of signification associated feminine reading habits with mass-culture, emotion, and consumption, whereas masculine reading habits were linked to high literature, intellectual activity and the production of knowledge (Huyssen 1986: 49-59; Modleski 1986 (2005): 48-49; Hermes 2005: 136-37).

The gender binary and its associated discursive chain of signification were also influential in the production and consumption of history during the nineteenth century. Bonnie G. Smith (1998) suggests that even though academic history firmly placed itself in the domain of the universal, positioning the historian out-

side the male/female dichotomy, the scientific rationality was implicitly coded masculine. The division was discursive as well as material, very few women were allowed in the seminar rooms to debate archival sources and test arguments. The gender division within the developing practices of history connected to the well-known nineteenth century association between masculinity and the public sphere and the femininity of the private. The masculine coded subject matters of political history, the history of states, its rulers, governments and relations, dominated the early discipline of history. Smith (1998) contrasts this professional strand of history to 'high amateurism'. The high amateurs were women writing cultural history on the material culture of the everyday life covering a wide societal spectrum, from prominent queens and noblewomen to local history and working class women. They wrote novels, reportages, essays and political critique. According to Smith (1998: 170-171), 'the amateur expanded cognition to include aesthetic, emotional, and kinetic registers' and their products often contained 'detailed descriptions of women's fancy work, furniture, sculpture, jewellery, and other works of art, increasingly their books carried many pictures'. Like in the genre of romantic historicism, the texts became spectacular through the use of panoramic descriptions materialising settings before the mirror of the mind (Smith 1998: 159; Samuels 2004: 15; Melman 2006: 66pp).

The feminine coded 'high amateurism' coincided with the late nineteenth-century development of feuilleton novels and popular magazines (Smith 1998: 159-160), that is, media forms discursively linked to femininity and consumption. But it was not only women that were positioned as consumers when general interest magazines developed in North America. General interest magazines showed the middle-class in its entirety how to join consumption and education (Schneirov 1994; Ohman 1996; Sharpe 2000; Rothenberg 2007). Even so, development in the US was discussed in terms of feminization, leading to efforts to reinvent manhood via sporting activities (Kimmel 1993/2003).

Cultural studies and media scholars have, in their work on the advancement of men's magazines in the UK in the late twentieth century, addressed a very similar development. Here, a set of new magazines spread in concert with innovations in men's wear design and advertising, producing a new visual coding of masculinity (Nixon 1997). This development may be interpreted 'as a reaction of (and as an active force in shaping) men's changing gender relations and identities' (Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks 2001: 2). In the eighties, magazines presented men as objects to be looked at and supported ideals of bodily care, consumption and leisure. Their followers in the nineties displayed ideals and ambiguities related to sexuality, drinks and football (see also Benwell 2003). Magazines are thus prisms for the negotiating of different masculinities (Jackson, Stevenson & Brooks 2001). Before heading into the negotiations of masculinities in *Populär Historia*, I will delve upon the ways in which this magazine connects the subject matter of history to the domain of consumer capitalism.

Promoting the Consumption of History

Populär Historia resembles magazines addressing a female readership in the ways it reworks its subject matter in one issue after the other. If magazines addressing women cultivate femininities associated to beauty and fashion (Winship 1987; Hermes 1995, Lövgren 2009), *Populär Historia* nurtures readers who have a serious interest in learning more about the past, especially the history of the Swedish nation, cultural history, western military history and the biographies of celebrity politicians, kings, warlords, queens and noble women, explorers and archaeologists. Correspondently to women's magazines, there is a continuum between editorial material and advertisements linking the subject matter of the magazine to the consumption of related goods (McCracken 1993). In the case of history magazines, the preferred links are made to popular history books (de Groot 2009). But as I will develop upon below, *Populär Historia* draws together a wide range of goods in different genres and media dealing with history in a broad sense.

Populär Historia is a case in point of a generic thematic correspondence between editorial content and ads. Often, the correspondence takes on the form of manifest intertextuality. Articles deal with the topics of books advertised in the same, or close in time, issues. The magazine's review section further enhances the links to the book market even though the correspondence between the review session and the ads is not as strong as the link between ads and articles. Looking at the chronology of *Populär Historia*'s publishing house, it turns out that the magazine predated its book branch. It was the magazine and the contacts with the authors that prompted the publishers to start publish popular history books (Rubin 1999).

The success of *Populär Historia* developed in concert with an increasing sale of books in book clubs and Internet shops (cf Bohlund 2008). *Populär Historia* displays ads from a wide range of publishing houses and several Internet bookshops extending, by far, their own publishing house. Editorial sections also present new movies, museum exhibitions, and promote travel destinations of historical interest, at the same time as film clubs, museums and travel agencies are frequent advertisers. Some ads are presented on pages designed so as to create an impression of an editorial selection. Each issue contains several pages drawing together smaller ads from travel agents and book clubs, museum's home pages or antiquarian bookshops under common headings such as Historic sites, Historic Links or the Historic Store-House.

Populär Historia demonstrates plenty of editorial 'tie-ins' providing associative links and thematic overlaps between articles and ads (McCracken 1993: 45). For instance, a review of a book on the history of ideas within Christianity is illustrated by an image of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The following page displays a different image of the same building, in the context of an ad for a book on Rome. Taken together, the two pages might produce an urge for buying books on Rome

or to read up on the subject. A more obvious case is the when two ads for journeys to Korea are directly followed by an article on the Korean War. In both examples, adjacency and placement boost the messages in the ads.

The manifest intertextuality and the thematic overlaps between ads, articles, and various editorial contents, give an impression of a seamless whole. From the point of view of ideological critique, one could argue that the generic form of magazines naturalises ideologies of consumption (McCracken 1993: 42-63). In women's magazines, the content supports the reader's feeling of inadequacy in areas such as beauty, fashion and housekeeping. The editorial content as well as the ads then provide advice and suggest remedies for the perceived need through the consumption of particular products (Winship 1987: 55-64).

When history enters the magazine format, it is coloured by this particular media form's connection to market capitalism. One of the overall logics of market capitalism is to produce a demand for the perpetual production of new and fresh commodities. It seems to be something in the subject matter of history that fits very well with this logic. Ann Rigney (2001) suggests that the writing of history is characterised by imperfectness, produced by the gap between what took place in the past, and how these events can later be represented. The representation of the past is restricted by the lack of information and the vagueness of the topic. Developing on Foucault, Rigney argues that new representations of the past are contingent on existing forms of representations (2001: 93-96).

Rigney's argument supports this article's exploration of the medium's effect on the production of history in *Populär Historia*. The medium's dependence on images guides the decision on subject matters for articles. Yet another argument of hers, that there is an inherent dissatisfaction, on behalf of authors as well as readers, with existing histories in terms of topics covered, has bearing on one of the claims in this article, that producers and consumers of history in popular culture strive to cover new grounds in order to fill in the gaps of what is available for sale. In her words: 'the perennial failure to capture the past whets the appetite to try again' (Rigney 2001: 139). Rigney's argument applies to cultural history and historic novels, but I will suggest that it is equally relevant to history in popular culture, and more specifically in history magazines. Even though each and every article is a complete entity with a beginning and an end, often with a turning point and a coda, the overall format of magazines begs for the reader to go along with the ads to buy another book, travel to one more historical site, buy a DVD or go to the movies, to turn the page, or to buy another issue of the magazine to learn more about the past and to fill knowledge gaps.

Kaleidoscoping the Past and Connecting History to the Cult of Fame

Populär Historia gives the impression of a kaleidoscope, carrying with it an invitation to give it one more turn to find out more about the past. Each and every article creates a temporary entity, produced by a turn of a kaleidoscope. All articles are lavishly illustrated by portraits, paintings of great battles, city panoramas, or eyewitness photography from iconic moments of political or military history. Main articles cover at least two, sometimes up to five spreads. The colourful impression is enhanced by headings printed in colours and the use of coloured backdrops for shorter segments of texts within articles.

Every issue displays a collection of articles, each and every one presents a particular articulation of time and space: a person's life, a particular battle, a war or an aspect of one, an iconic event or series of events, a golden age such as the Swedish Bronze age, the Viking age, or ancient Greece, to mention a few of the cover stories in *Populär Historia* 2007-2008.

The collected slices of time and space in each and every issue produce a temporary totality constituting an intricate pattern. As there is a new issue every month, the magazine presents a seemingly unfathomable series of space-time slices in new and intriguing patterns. In addition to the cover stories and main articles, *Popular Historia* contains notices on current jubilees, recent dissertations, archaeological findings in a range of archaeological subdisciplines, iconic photos, shorter articles on objects from museum collections and much more. There is an editorial, pages with letters to the editor, and a review section, all pointing to items recently made publicly available from media companies as well as from public institutions.

Male historians and journalists are the most frequent author's in *Populär Historia* (Sjöland 2011: 91). The trustworthiness of their articles is generally not carried by references to sources but by the name of the author and his or her title. Titles such as Historians, PhD students and Docents carry with them the expertise in source criticism and knowledge about the past. Journalists and writers have skills in interpreting sources and telling accurate stories. Marianne Sjöland (2011) suggests that *Populär Historia* presents a modified academic history. It does not reflect contemporary university history in terms of topics covered and even though its stories carry with them explanations of past events they lack critical engagement with sources and explicit models of explanation. Increasingly articles refer to popular history books, movies and television series.

The way in which each and every issue of *Populär Historia* brings together a vast range of merchandises in the subject domain of history, suggests that it may be compared to a shopping centre, a space, in which a great variety of symbols, texts and images flow through and interplay (Fornäs 2002). On the one hand, it acts as a centripetal force drawing stories and writers toward its centre of rotation. On

the other hand, the magazine's centripetal force is interlaced with general centrifugal forces, diffusing and multiplying media narratives and authorships, in a range of media and texts.

Such processes of intertextuality and intermediality are intrinsic features of late modern media cultures (Fornäs 2002; Fornäs et al. 2007b). In the domain of history in popular culture, the works of single authorships diffuse into movies, television series, references in biographies, and sites for tourism and play (Aronsson 2004: 131pp, de Groot 2009: 11-13). This type of commercial intertextuality invites readers to follow stories across media spaces and is shaped very differently from the intertextuality practiced by university-trained historians. Academic history is based on critical engagement with publically available sources and sources are used to underpin argument and conclusions (Rigney 2001: 121-122). I would suggest that *Populär historia* negotiates these two positions.

Visually, the articles resemble bricolages, with the re-use of images from a range of different genres and techniques. What are produced here are simulacra, spectacles and stereotypes without any references to originals in the wake of the cultural logic of late capitalism (cf. Jameson 1991). Preferably the magazine uses images to visualise the facts of the captions or to highlight details in the articles. Even though they often take up more space than the text, the images are most often displayed without any critical reflection on their contexts of production. Instead, the images are stamped with references to the image agency that 'owns' the image and who are specialized in circulating images for endless digital and commercial reproduction. The named authors, and the connections made to academic history, provide the magazine with legitimacy, something that its glossy materiality and spectacular design cannot achieve.

Some of the most shimmering pieces in *Populär Historia's* kaleidoscope display the lives of royalty, noble men and women, political leaders, militaries or warlords, artists, scientists and explorers. The magazine's focus on biographies and its visual format connects *Populär Historia* to popular culture's cult of celebrity. The notion of celebrity is sometimes traced back to depictions of political leaders on coins, statues and other imageries produced already by the Romans (Braudy 1986; Gamson 1994: 17; Barry 2008: 253). It boomed much later in panopticons in which villains; sovereigns; vaudeville stars; explorers and literate men were put on display (Barry 2008). Later technological and organisational developments, supporting the circulation of text and images in print and the movies, were important forerunners to current celebrity cults in television, gossip magazines and on the web (Barry 2008; Nyblom 2008). Here Madame Tussaud's wax-works museum makes up a connection between not only the earlier century's cults of fame and contemporary times fads for celebrity, as suggested by (Barry 2008), but also the interrelations between fame, celebrity and what Billie Melman (2006) labels as the 'culture of history'. Today, the link between halls of fame, celebrity culture and history in popular culture is reinforced by the popularity of the bio-

graphical genre. The way in which the genre of the biography ‘contains a life, attempts to explain, account for and map it out’ (de Groot 2009: 38), seems to make it extremely suitable for books as well as articles in history magazines. Below, I want to focus on two articles, biographical from the outset, in which the nexus of masculinities, power and war is negotiated by the use of images and generic traits from celebrity journalism.

Victories and Losses of Peter the Great

Populär Historia’s biographies of great leaders are peppered with idealizing and deifying portraits. These portraits are public presentations of selves in which accessories acts as props on a theatre stage to reinforce the importance of the sitters (Burke 2001: 26). In addition, coronation dresses and full uniforms produce a sense of grandeur and turn powerful men into icons (Burke 2001: 65-69). The illustrations of an article on the Russian tsar Peter the Great is a case in point (Oredsson 2007). The first article spread paints the picture of an unapproachable and glorious man. The heading, in red, bold letters, presents him as the premiere enemy of the Swedish state. Two thirds of the spread is filled with a portrait depicting him with exceptionally wide shoulders. His masculine appearance is accentuated by a fur-trimmed red mantel. A blue ribbon crosses his chest and draws attention to the hand holding on to a sword, indicating that he is ready to defend his country. His mantel is held together by an impressive piece of jewellery and a white elephant, an animal symbolising strength and energy, solidity and memory decorates the blue ribbon. The gaze of the tsar meets the viewer, addressing him or her directly, and demands the viewer to enter into a relationship with him.

Although the portrait of Peter the Great is magnifying, it depicts the tsar in a kind of void, as there are no people around him. It demands the spectator to fill in the void by either identifying with the great leader, becoming his equal, or by stepping into the shoes of his subordinated. The latter subject position is even more accentuated in the two images in the article, which depict Tsar Peter from below. They accentuate that his epithet is the great, and demand the spectator to look up upon the leader. One of these magnifying images is titled the *Founding of St Petersburg*. It is a reproduction of a work in the genre of history painting and it visualises the facts of the caption, that Peter the Great founded the city in 1703. The painting shows a man in action, surrounded by men whose gazes express either admiration or subordination. This supposedly realistic painting might be contrasted to another reproduction in the article, whose caption highlights that this smallish picture is allegorical. The painting depicts Peter the Great on a horseback against the backdrop of battle. An angel, with a trumpet swans above him; ready to place a victory crown on his head. This is a portrait of Tsar Peter at the battle of Poltava in which the Swedes were defeated and it, as well as the article’s other

battlefield painting, places the spectator outside the actual combats, as a bystander and observer of a victory, rather than a participant in a lost war.

The images in the article thus, in different ways, invite the spectator to admire the emperor. The text partly supports this storyline and the author is Sverker Oredsson, a professor of history who, in 1998, edited a book on the tsar, his Swedish antagonist and their respective peoples. The article in *Populär Historia* focuses on Peter the Great and starts with his childhood, informing the reader of his upbringing and education. Following a recurrent pattern in *Populär Historia*, the childhood, together with a few decisive moments, are presented as formative for how his life developed. The success story focuses on how the Russian army defeated the Swedish armed forces and conquered Swedish Finland and other then Swedish land areas in the Baltic area. Articles within the article paint a picture of Tsar Peter as a man of reformation, for example by westernising his empire after Swedish models and pushing for women's rights. Another piece of text discusses whether Peter was a genius or a tyrant. The article's coda creates an image of an unusually capable man.

A counterpoint to Peter the Great's achievements is presented in a smallish article within the main article. Here, his life story is told in relation to the women he married or took as mistresses. It is a story about betrayals and cruelty, about how he participated in the beating to death of his son, and how he ended up with drinking problems and a venereal disease. It is illustrated by a history painting, depicting Tsar Peter and his son in what appears to be a domestic environment. The glance into what today appears as private details, behind the scenes, is a common feature of celebrity biographies. It produces a sense of authenticity and intimacy with the otherwise distant star (Dyer 2004: 10). From this point of view, the story of Peter's private life reminds the reader that vulnerability is the flipside of success. It also brings about a kind of masculinity associated to the dark, dangerous and destructive characters in the Romantic Movement (cf Dyer 2004: 11).

The move can also be explained by nationalistic tendencies in the article and a motif from earlier Swedish popular culture of history. It is not the first time that Peter the Great is depicted as a womanizer and a drunkard in the Swedish culture of popular history. Two movies, produced in the 1920s, on the tsar's Swedish counterpart, Karl XII, give a similar portrait of Tsar Peter. In an article on national sentiments and masculinity in these two movies, Tommy Gustafsson suggests that the producers solved the problem, from a nationalistic point of view, of the Swedish defeat by demonizing the Russian tsar and glorifying the Swedish king. Within diverse cultural settings, in particularly those that adhere to Enlightenment rationality and bourgeois values, the excessive life-style associated to Tsar Peter is deemed negative. In the movies, it functions as a counterpoint to the self-controlled and sober Swedish king (Gustafsson 2005).

So, whereas the format of the idealising portrait aims at evoking identification, admiration or subordination, the accompanying text open up the possibilities for

readers to identify themselves with, take pity in, or resent, the not so perfect private person. This glimpse into the domestic life of a powerful man blurs the distinction between, on the one the hand, male bodies, the public sphere and political power, and, on the other hand, female bodies, the private sphere and lack of power. The article on Tsar Peter positions him as considerably less powerful in the private sphere of human relations, than in the public sphere. At the same time, his life story, as it is presented in *Populär Historia*, gives evidence to the claim that, in his time and place, the private and the public were intricately connected for royalties. It is only with the sharper distinction between public and private spheres, which came with the rise of industrialism, the bourgeois and the middle classes in the nineteenth century, that this distinction really makes sense. The article may thus invite its readers and spectators to look upon Peter the Great with anachronistic spectacles.

Churchill's Melancholy

A similar, yet different, pattern is repeated in a biography on Winston Churchill (Johansson 2007). His elevated position is accentuated by the heading: 'Born to be a leader'. The first spread shows him in front of his desk, dressed in the power insignias of his time: a black jacket and vest over a white shirt with bowtie. His chest is decorated with a watch chain; his left hand holds a cigar and rests on a map. Here, I particularly want to draw the attention to the map. Maps are a cultural form that link aspirations of territorial power with claims to truth. Somehow paradoxically, they provide solid bases of judgment on the grounds of an informed overview (Rogoff 2000: 75-96). They may serve as vehicles for leaders to make rational decisions as they provide a god's eye view distant from the nitty-gritty reality of the common soldier.

Popular Historia's feature on Churchill describes a long and power-imbued political career also including quite a few setbacks and disappointments. One of the setbacks, the huge losses at Gallipoli, is highlighted with the reproduction of a painting of the landing at the Anzac Cove. The text underlines that Churchill himself was not the originator of the plan, but he nevertheless took it as a lesson. Otherwise, the article paints a picture of a man who, already as a child, was amused by the adventures of war. Later on, his ambitions were channelled into the fields of literature and politics. The illustrations of the article support this story line, with images of Churchill as a child and as young hussar in the colonies, to photos of his wife accepting the Noble Prize in Stockholm and his funeral procession in London. The photos in between depict Churchill with other political leaders of his time, Chamberlain, Roosevelt and Stalin. Only one image portrays him in relation the ordinary man, inspecting the home guard in London.

The bringing forth of the young Churchill's interest in toy soldiers, his bravery and his first career in the late nineteenth-century colonial wars link his biography

to the masculinity of the British soldier hero. The figure of soldier hero, writes Graham Dawson, flourishes in popular culture and toys to guide the phantasies and national sentiments of British men. Connected to British imperialism it is, for example, inscribed in the news items and legends of Sir Henry Havelock, who in his time became a 'media star' after his recapture of Cawnpore from Indian rebels in 1857 and his passing away soon after (Dawson 1994: 105).

Churchill's biography in *Populär Historia* adds another layer to the soldier hero imaginary and invites non-British spectators and readers to buy in to it. Thanks not only to cultural imaginaries and toys, but also to general conscriptions, the military has provided a basis for masculinity as a universal category transcending differences of class and region. Having said this, Dudink and Hagemann (2004) underline that there are substantial differences between the various ways in which men have been integrated and ideologically hailed into political and military projects. There are differences between nations due to differences between military institutions as well as between various types of soldiers depending on rank, occupation and access to power (Wadman 2005).

Churchill's position as a leader of a nation at war is as distant from *Populär Historia's* ideal middle class male reader as that of Peter the Great. However, Churchill's biography in *Populär Historia* situates him right at the heart of the key areas in which the power-oriented hegemonic masculinity has been enacted; world politics and the military (Connell 1995/2005: 264). Churchill represents an ideal type of masculinity for all sorts of men to identify with or comply to. In a similar way as with Peter the Great, it is balanced with another type of masculinity. Churchill is associated with the multifaceted and culturally, socially and historically contingent state of melancholy. In some respects, the melancholy makes the elevated leader more human as it portrays Churchill oscillating between two emotional registers, malaise and magnitude, a pendulous motion linked to the black melancholy of creative and intellectual masculinity (Johannisson 2010: 32). The article's first paragraphs paint a picture of a disillusioned leader, blaming himself for not being able to save the British empire. The coda of the article describes the old Churchill as broken and disenchanted with a sense of failure, while at the same time described as the celebrated author of a series of books on WWII and one who had strived to return to political power.

The author of the biography is professor of History Alf W. Johansson, and the biography is followed by a second article written by the journalist Erik Jansson (2007). The second article invites the reader to tour the Chartwell Manor, Churchill's home for many years. Its panoramic description of the surroundings of the house and its interior design resembles genre traits of women's high amateurism (Smith 2000). We have already seen that inserting the private domain into the public sphere is an intrinsic feature of the cults of fame. Following this last line of thought, one could argue that Churchill staged his home for public use. Already in Churchill's lifetime, the estate was sold to National Trust, a charity organization

which protects and opens heritage buildings to the public. Like so many other homes of writers, artists and politicians, Chartwell was turned into a monument of its owner meant to remind future generations of his accomplishments. The article's giving away of dark details on the lives of Churchill's children casts shadows on the elevated man and points to the genre of the celebrity biography. The article suggests that the Churchill's neglect more or less caused the death of one of their daughters. The parent's deeds are explained away, with reference to the spirit of the time. At the same time, the need for an explanation carries with it a late modern proposition that the reproductive and emotional labour involved in family life, traditionally linked to femininity, is a relevant aspect of masculinity too. However, this is a trace of late modern masculinity that runs counter to the soldier hero masculinity, which is defined in contrast to parenthood and intimacy in the domestic sphere (Dawson 1994: 282-283). In this way, this biography too invites the reader and spectator to look into the darker side of the powerful man's private life with contemporary eyes.

Conclusion

The two biographies discussed in this article have been explored so as to cast light on the nexus of masculinities, power, military and war in *Populär Historia*. The analysis has highlighted the ways in which idealising portraits, the celebrity cult and layers of historically contingent ways for men to act in public and private spheres intersect in these articles. All in all, the mighty and the powerful are displayed in somehow contradictory ways, enabling multiple entrance points for the contemporary reader and spectator. The biographies start from associating masculinity with power, outlining the ways in which these men rule states and empires, how they relate to other leaders, lead armies, fight over territories, found cities and project impressive homes. By giving away details of their domestic lives, the articles underline that powerful men are heterosexual, reproductive and relate to women and children. Yet another preferred masculinity in these portraits is the creative genius touched upon either by excess or by melancholy.

Biographies on leaders, including conflicts between states, are history from above (Jordanova 2006: 42). As a kind of counter position to the magnifying visual imaginary and the success-stories, the printed words in the articles present the extremely powerful as weak in domestic life. Drawing on masculinity ideals associated with the Romantic Movement and pre-modern masculinities, these domestic details unsettle associations of masculinity with reason and femininity with emotion. As a result, the association between masculinity and self-sufficiency is challenged. However, the emotional register of melancholy goes very well with societal power and hegemonic masculinity. Even so, it links the very powerful with the vulnerability of all men and women. It bridges between past and present, between leaders and subordinated or compliant men and women, and secures the

authority of male political leadership. Masculinities are thus negotiated without profoundly challenging the hegemonic frame.

In the biographies, narratives and images reciprocally provide support to each other. The interdependence pushes the biographies towards reliance of idealising portraits, historical paintings or press photos of iconic events available via image agencies. These images act as a receptacle for a whole variety of fantasies and tie in to cultural imaginaries on warlords and political leadership. The ways in which they detail out insignias and distinguishing outfits sees them also expanding the representations to include material culture as well. Like in the high amateurism, outlined by Smith (1998), the biographies embrace the spectator's aesthetic registers.

Magazines may be conceptualised as a feminine form of media providing spaces for the negotiations of both contemporary and historical masculinities. Especially the visuality of the magazine and its boosting of consumer goods run counter to the educational qualities associated to the male coded political and military history. *Populär Historia* reworks the subject matter of history in issue after issue while constantly whetting the appetite for new stories drawing on the generic form of the magazine to position both men and women as consumers. Even though the modernist outset that associated femininities with consumption and emotion, and masculinities with intellectual activity and the production of knowledge, has to be considered as superannuated, it somehow casts its shadow over contemporary negotiations on the use of history.

Populär Historia makes biographies into cover stories. The magazine produces a desire for history by connecting late modern visual celebrity culture to the cults of fame in earlier centuries. Idealising portraits send messages of ideal masculinities for spectators to desire and identify with in a similar way as women and men of style and good looks on the covers of women's and men's magazines allure the spectator into a world of consumption associated to specific sets of preferred femininities and masculinities. In *Populär Historia*, images of powerful men in history hail the reader of historical magazines into the world of rulers, international relations and war also available on the market for popular history books.

However, history magazines such as *Populär Historia* do more than pack the subject matter of history for consumption. *Populär Historia* produces a broad address for a narrow audience with the nexus of masculinities, power and war as one of its point of attraction. Its historical representations are equally dependent on the authority of academic history, cultural imaginaries and celebrity cults. On the one hand, by its modified academic history, *Populär Historia* negotiates the low of the popular with the high of history. On the other hand, in the wake of the contemporary culturalisation of history, the high of history is negotiated when an academic and educational subject matter enters the spectacular world of consumer culture. *Populär Historia*'s kaleidoscopic form contributes to, and is contingent on, what is available in other contemporary media on the subject matter of history. Conse-

quently, its kaleidoscopic take on the past produces relationships between, on the one hand, publishing houses and various industries that package the past for a consumer market, and on the other hand, real men and women.

Dr. Bodil Axelsson is assistant professor at Tema Q, Linköping University. Her research revolves around history in popular culture, arts based research, museum studies and educational science. bodil.axelsson@liu.se

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“Chinesenesses” Outside Mainland China: Macao and Taiwan through Post-1997 Hong Kong Cinema

By Hilary Hongjin He

Abstract

By examining the filmic representation of Macao and Taiwan in Hong Kong films, mostly released after the 1997 sovereignty transfer, this paper will address the notion of Chineseness in its plural form as associated with different Chinese societies. The purpose is to bring attention to the cosmopolitan side of Chineseness in Hong Kong cinema rather than the mere influence from the Mainland (PRC). I will argue that it is this pluralised, composite Chineseness reflected in Hong Kong cinema that has reinforced its very “Hong Kong-ness” against the impact from the “orthodox” Chineseness of the Mainland. Through a combination of textual and contextual analyses of selected Hong Kong diaspora films respectively set in Macao and Taiwan, this paper aims to provide a general understanding of the imbrications of various Chinese societies within Greater China and, most importantly, the changing role and position of Hong Kong (cinema) within this conceptual China as “one country” before and after it became a special part of the PRC.

Keywords : Hong Kong cinema, Macao, Taiwan, Chineseness, China

Introduction

Being Chinese outside China cannot possibly mean the same thing as inside. It varies from place to place, molded by the local circumstances in different parts of the world where people of Chinese ancestry have settled and constructed new ways of living.

“Can One Say No to Chineseness?
Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm”
Ien Ang (1998:225)

Since July 1, 1997 Hong Kong has become a Special Administration Region (SAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) under the “one country, two systems” principle. In order to enhance the regional economic integration between Mainland China and Hong Kong, the two has signed the implementation of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) in July 2003. According to the CEPA, Hong Kong-Mainland co-produced films are treated as the domestic products in the Mainland market exempt from import quota. Therefore, Hong Kong film industry has seen a major trend of the Mainland-oriented co-productions and a comparatively small proportion of local productions emphasizing Hong Kong specificity. Apart from these two categories, there are still a number of Hong Kong films set neither in Mainland China nor Hong Kong, but in the Chinese diasporas. These films, though limited in number, are fairly influential and significant both artistically and socially, if not all of them have been commercial successes. For example, two of Hong Kong’s submissions for the Academy Awards – *Exile* (2005) and *Prince of Tears* (2009) – are set respectively in Macao and Taiwan.

On the one hand, these post-handover diaspora-themed films continue to affirm Hong Kong’s status as “a prolific production center for Chinese diaspora culture” (Lo, 2005: 3). On the other, by being in different Chinese societies, these films have in a sense illustrated the diasporic Chinesenesses that Ien Ang (1998: 225) described as “to be Chinese in his own way” outside mainland China. Moreover, to some extent, they reflected Hong Kong filmmakers’ general outlook on the notion of “China” as “one country” through their specific takes on these varied Chinesenesses.

According to the PRC’s official definition of her “one country, two systems” policy, “one country” refers to the People’s Republic of China, and Hong Kong, Macau, and even Taiwan should all belong to this “one country”. However, rather than following the official definition and the international *de jure* recognition of the PRC as China, this paper will examine Hong Kong cinema against a “China” in a broader sense – the notional concept of “Greater China” (Harding 1993; Uhalley 1994; Callahan 2004). Moving away from the territory of mainland China, the scope of this paper will expand to other Chinese diasporas within the imagined “one country” of Greater China. Due to the word limit, this paper will only focus on Macao and Taiwan, the two peripheral/disputed Chinese societies under the Chinese sovereignty.

By examining the filmic representation of Macao and Taiwan in selected Hong Kong films, most of which made/released in the post-1997 era, I will address the notion of Chineseness in its plural form as associated with different Chinese societies. The purpose is to bring attention to illuminate the cosmopolitan side of Chineseness in Hong Kong cinema rather than the mere influence from the Mainland (PRC). I will argue that it is this pluralised, composite Chineseness reflected in Hong Kong cinema that has reinforced its very “Hong Kong-ness” against the impact from the “orthodox” Chineseness of the Mainland. Through a combination of textual and contextual analyses of selected Hong Kong diaspora films respectively set in Macao and Taiwan, this paper aims to provide a general understanding of the imbrications of various Chinese societies within Greater China and, most importantly, the changing role and position of Hong Kong (cinema) within this conceptual China as “one country” before and after it became a special part of the PRC.

1 How Does the “Chineseness” of Hong Kong Cinema Reinforce its Specificity?

With a border within the PRC to delimit Hong Kong as a Special Administration Region, the uniqueness of Hong Kong – or its specificity – is often emphasised or pursued as a parameter of how different Hong Kong is from the Mainland area in the PRC. From the stereotyped mainlander movie or television characters in the British Hong Kong era to the recent non-co-produced films targeting Hong Kong local market, these media productions are all indications of such attempts to accentuate the Hong Kong specificity in its popular culture. However, with the economic development and further opening-up of the PRC, Hong Kong seems to be less distinct from mainland China than it used to be two or three decades ago. As Hong Kong scholar Kwai-Cheung Lo (2005: 4) rightfully noted, “It would no longer be so easy to declare its so-called uniqueness to be in opposition to the Chineseness of (mainland) China.” In his book *Chinese Face/Off: the Transnational Popular Culture of Hong Kong*, Lo (2005: 4) argued that “If there is such a thing [as Hong Kong specificity], it operates according to the logic of a fantasy that affirms the ideological power of what it means to be Chinese, rather than any determinate local position.” Therefore, instead of arguing for the existence of “Hong Kong specificity,” which is defined by its “otherness” to the Chineseness of the Mainland, Lo (2005) examined the Chineseness of Hong Kong’s transnational culture so as to problematise “the contemporary *meanings* of being Chinese” [my emphasis] (2) through Hong Kong culture.

The use of plurality in the expression “the contemporary *meanings* of being Chinese” [my emphasis] by Lo (2005: 2) echoes what Ien Ang (1998) called a “theoretical axiom that Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content...

whose *meanings* are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora” [my emphasis]. As Ang (1998: 225) noted (as in prefatory quote for this paper):

Being Chinese outside China cannot possibly mean the same thing as inside. It varies from place to place, molded by the local circumstances in different parts of the world where people of Chinese ancestry have settled and constructed new ways of living.

In this sense, due to the political division within Greater China, there are multiple versions of “Chineseness” running in parallel in different Chinese societies, such as Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. However, K. C. Lo (2005) did not simply repeat the de-centered pluralisation of Chinesenesses and apply it to Hong Kong culture. Instead, he asserted that “Hong Kong’s Chineseness is not one of the particular Chinesenesses to struggle with the origin [mainland China] by displacing it in its own specific ways” (Lo 2005: 8), but “a site of performative contradictions” which “embodies the fundamental imbalance and inconsistency of the cultural totality of contemporary China” (Ibid: 4). By applying the term “inherent transgression” to Hong Kong’s Chineseness, Lo argued that under the “one country, two systems” arrangement, Hong Kong is:

the singular exception that enables one to formulate the totality as such [domain of Chineseness][Hong Kong’s Chineseness] can refer to an abstract wholeness that is implied by a singular element that is structurally displaced and out of joint. Within a given cultural totality, it is precisely that exceptional element that stands for that culture’s all-encompassing dimension.

(Lo 2005: 8)

By emphasizing Hong Kong’s “exceptional-ness”, Lo’s argument for the composite/cosmopolitan Chineseness of Hong Kong has interestingly but convincingly reinforced the Hong Kong specificity which he had hedged in the first place. In the case of Hong Kong cinema, the diasporic films are typical examples of Hong Kong specificity embodied in its Chineseness of “an abstract wholeness” (Lo 2005: 8) of China. By taking up the topics like local mafia-fights or casinos in Macao (*The Longest Nite*, *Exiled*, *Poker King*), the anti-communist “white terror” or the democratic presidential election in Taiwan (*Prince of Tears*, *Ballistic*), these diaspora Hong Kong films are Chinese stories set outside Hong Kong itself or mainland China but belong to the conceptual “Greater China.” In this sense, rather than being based on the PRC state, the Chineseness of Hong Kong cinema can be seen as based on the idea of a Greater China. Therefore, instead of undermining its particularity, the cosmopolitan side of Chineseness in Hong Kong cinema has reinforced its Hong Kong-ness as the exception to the PRC polity, although as the nexus of the Greater China.

According to Harding (1993: 660), the essence of Greater China refers to “the rapidly increasing interaction among Chinese societies around the world as the political and administrative barriers to their intercourse fall.” While Harding

(1993: 661) explains the word “greater” as suggesting “a coherent economic and demographic region that spans administrative borders” as in “Greater London,” Uhalley (1994: 280) adds that the word “greater” might also “be seen to encompass and accommodate the reality of separation, whether it is temporary, partial, or permanent.” This paper will interrogate in how the “coherent” yet “separated” Greater China is epitomised in the cosmopolitan Chineseness of Hong Kong cinema through its diasporic films. By introducing the notion of Greater China as a bigger framework for “one country, two systems”, I will examine the different attitudes toward a coherent “one China” within this great entity.

First, with Hong Kong’s cinematic representations and comments, I will demonstrate how the casino city Macao has become the PRC’s role model for Taiwan because of its compliant attitude toward the Central Government, as well as its excellent economic performance since the reunification. Second, through two Hong Kong films respectively set in the Taiwan martial law era and more recent democratic era, I will illustrate Taiwan’s insistence on its different interpretation of China as the Republic of China (ROC) rather than the internationally recognised PRC government. The overall purpose of this paper is to bring awareness to the imbricate concept of “China” reflected in Hong Kong films: from the *de jure* PRC in mainland China to the unrecognised ROC government in Taiwan, which used to be the legitimate representative of China in the United Nations till 1971, and to the abstract notion of “Greater China.”

2 Macao : An “Exemplary” Special Administration Region

The vigor and vitality of the Macao SAR today are a vivid reflection of the strong life-force of the ‘one country, two systems’ principle.

Chief Executive of the Macao SAR Fernando Chui Sai On
at the inauguration Anniversary Celebration Gathering,
Third-Term Government Inauguration Held in Macao December 20, 2009
(as cited in Beijing Review, December 21, 2009)

Two and half years after Hong Kong’s changeover, Macao has become the second Special Administrative Region of the PRC on December 20, 1999. As one of only two SARs under the “one country, two systems” arrangement, Macao has received much less attention than Hong Kong. This is because Macao is much smaller and less developed economically than Hong Kong. However, since 2006, Macao has become the world’s largest gambling city, with its gaming revenue surpassing that of Las Vegas in the U.S., and its per capita gross domestic product (GDP) has for the first time overtaken Hong Kong to rank as second in Asia (Vong 2009; *The Economist* 2010). Moreover, in 2009, Macao has passed a state security law generally known as “Article 23” which, according to BBC News, has proven itself “a more pliable region of China than Hong Kong” (BBC 2009). The political pliability, as well as its strong economic competitiveness, has made Ma-

cao turn from a pre-handover “sin city” to an exemplary showcase of the PRC’s “one country, two systems” policy.

Portuguese Macao in Hong Kong Films

Due to its small size and population, Macao has never had a film industry of its own, nor has it become a targeted market of Hong Kong films like Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. However, since the 1950s, because of the geographical proximity and its majority Cantonese-speaking population, Macao has emerged as a convenient, if by no means important, locale in Hong Kong films. In the pre-handover Hong Kong cinema, the Macao element often appeared briefly in those crime and gangster films as a lawless haven for the fugitives from Hong Kong. As Hong Kong scholar Vivian P.Y. Lee (2009: 66) noted, “Notwithstanding its geographical and cultural affinity to Hong Kong, and despite its frequent appearance in Hong Kong films, Macau is rarely treated as a subject on its own.” During the first decade since the 1997 handover of Hong Kong, Macao suddenly became a more significant film setting for Hong Kong films. Although the Portuguese administration of Macao ended December 20, 1999, soon after Hong Kong’s changeover, colonial Macao in its final days has frequently re-appeared in post-1997 Hong Kong films. Almost all of the Macao-related Hong Kong films made during the first decade of the post-1997 era have chosen to tell their stories against the background of the Portuguese-administered Macao facing its own handover countdown. In a sense, Portuguese Macao is used as the “doppelganger” of Hong Kong to transpose the nostalgic image of the former British colony, “when the nostalgic is no longer chic in one’s hometown” (V. Lee 2009: 84). Moreover, besides projecting Hong Kong’s own sense of anxiety about the handover onto the Macao setting, in some of the films, as Hong Kong scholar Vivian P.Y. Lee (2009: 64) has noted, “Macau is not Hong Kong’s Other, but has a history of its own that is equally perplexing and *scriptable* (original emphasis).”

Vivian P.Y. Lee (2009) did a comparative case study of two Hong Kong films that “take its (ex-)colonial neighbour seriously as an entity in itself” (p.69) – *Fu Bo* (2003, literally: Cantonese euphemism for “mortuary attendant”) and *Isabella* (2006). The two films are directed respectively by newly emerged young directors of Hong Kong, Ching-Po Wong and Pang Ho-Cheung. The former film, *Fu Bo*, takes up the theme of death through three interconnected stories about an old mortuary attendant, a death row prisoner who had killed an old man’s son, and a Portuguese prison chef who cooks the last supper for the prisoner. The latter, *Isabella*, is about realizing the meaning of life through a story of a teenage daughter reuniting with her father who had never been aware of her existence before she showed up out of nowhere. In both films, the protagonists’ personal experiences and the epiphanies of their life and death are intertwined with the pending social change on the eve of Macao’s handover. Therefore, Vivian P.Y. Lee (2009: 67) argues that the narrative of both films had revealed a certain “existential crisis” and it was this

crisis that had forged “a kind of kinship between Macau and Hong Kong in the two cities’ post-colonial present.” In other words, the post-handover Hong Kong cinema has started to take Macao more seriously as a film subject, rather than as an exotic element, because besides their geo-cultural proximity, the only two Special Administrative Regions of the PRC are now even more closely connected by their sociopolitical similarity brought by their respective “re-unifications” with the PRC. This presumed kinship is based on the two regions’ common marginalised positions and confused post-colonial identities of being simultaneously within and without the homeland after the “reunification.”

In this sense, the role of Hong Kong and Macao’s homeland “China”, both in the strict sense of the PRC on mainland China, and in the broader sense of “Greater China”, is essential in order better to understand the two regions’ “kinship” forged by their common post-handover “existential crisis” (V. Lee. 2009: 67). The two sullen Macao stories, *Fu Bo* and *Isabella*, have chosen to show a philosophical attitude toward this “existential crisis.” However, a series of the Macao triad-themed films made by Hong Kong-based independent film production company *Milkyway Image* have otherwise boldly enunciated more social and political criticism on the 1997 handover through audacious metaphors referring to the interrelationship between Hong Kong, Macao and the Mainland. The almost ubiquitous metaphors in these films have invited various interpretations and made “*Milkyway Image*” a prominent and distinctive brand name in post-1997 Hong Kong cinema (Pang 2002; Pun 2006; Teo 2007).

Co-founded in 1996 by Hong Kong film director and producer Johnnie To Kei-Fung and his frequent co-director Wai Ka-Fai, *Milkyway Image* started at the time when the Hong Kong film industry was in a desperate situation, fearful of losing its overseas markets in Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Moreover, the whole city was very anxious in its anticipation of the 1997 handover. The newly-established *Milkyway Image* had chosen to make small-budget films focusing on the local market and reflecting local concerns. It impressed the Hong Kong film industry with its first production *Too Many Ways to Be Number One* (1997), “a self-consciously nonconformist” and “thematically somewhat heavyhanded” film, as David Bordwell (2000: 269) put it. This somewhat experimental film has adapted a two-scenario structure similar to the German film *Lola Rennt* (a.k.a. *Run Lola Run* 1998, dir. Tom Tykwer). The storyline restarts in each of the scenarios as the protagonist makes a different life-determining choice and therefore receives an alternative ending. *Too Many Ways to Be Number One* begins with a Hong Kong local hooligan being told by a palm-reader that he has to leave Hong Kong to avoid a misfortune. He flees first to mainland China in the first scenario and then, in the second, to Taiwan.

Since the protagonist is first killed in his Mainland China adventure and then crippled in the restart scenario in Taiwan, *Too Many Ways To Be Number One* is generally read as a political allegory to imply that “Hong Kong’s future lies nei-

ther with China nor with Taiwan” (Bordwell 2000: 269). Given the fact that the film was first released in March 1997, less than four months before the Hong Kong handover in July 1, Bordwell’s association of the film and the political changeover of Hong Kong seems well-grounded. However, Hong Kong scholar Laikwan Pang (2002: 329) dismisses this political interpretation and also reasonably argues that “its China/Taiwan choice carries no real meaning...what the film reveals is a philosophical exploration of individuals’ freedom of choice.” This argument holds water when we examine *Too Many Ways To Be Number One* individually as a film with *an experimental touch*. However, when examined together with some other *Milkyway Image* productions, such as *The Longest Nite* (1998), *Election 2* (2006) and *Exiled* (2006), the film *Too Many Ways To Be Number One*, “is implicitly and explicitly concerned with the question of “Greater China” and Hong Kong’s place in this greater entity” as Stephen Teo (2007: 202) pointed out. These films are either set entirely in Macao or move between Hong Kong, Macao and the Mainland to allude to the complicated and sensitive relationships between these regions.

Among these films, *The Longest Nite* (1998) and *Exiled* (2006) are two prominent political allegories set in a disorderly Portuguese Macao on the eve of the regime change. On the one hand, the background of both films is a realistic portrayal of the uncontrolled gang violence since the mid-1990s, and hit its peak in the last two years before the 1999 Macao handover. On the other, the gang wars and conspiracies depicted in these two films are basically fictional stories based on the filmmakers’ political views and attitudes.



Figure 1-2 Movie posters for *The Longest Nite* (1998) and *Exiled* (2006), both Hong Kong-made gangster films set in pre-handover Macao

Violent crime in Macao had become a serious problem during the last few years in the 20th century leading up to its sovereignty transfer. From 1996 to 1999, the number of murders, shootings and even car bombs had surged. The victims ranged from the Portuguese high officials to local civilians and innocent foreign tourists. These crimes were seen as “a deliberate, taunting provocation of the authorities” (Clayton 2009: 69), and were generally assumed to be triad-related. The attempted murder of Antonio Marques Baptista in May 1998 had resulted in the prompt arrest of the alleged head of the largest Macao triad society Wan Kuok-koi (a.k.a. “Broken Tooth Koi”). In fact, Wan’s arrest was only a few days before the May 6, 1998 premier of *Casino* (1998), a Hong Kong gangster film based on his life story and largely financed by Wan himself. The fierce applause that the film received in Hong Kong may not be regarded as an indication of the Hong Kong audience’s admiration of the gangster Broken Tooth personally, nor their desire to “rebel against the vestiges of colonial law and order” as David Bordwell (2000: 37) has stated. However, it has definitely demonstrated the popularity of the gangster story (genre) among the local audience and their interests in the social order issues in Macao.

In such a dramatic context, *Milkyway Image* has made several Macao triad-related films since its founding in 1997. However, instead of the realistic depiction of the real-life gang wars in Macao, *Milkyway Image*, under the leadership of its producer/director Johnnie To Kei-Fung and Wai Ka-Fai, has chosen to convey subtle political criticism through the fictional gangster stories. *The Longest Nite* (*An Hua*, literally: *Dark Flower*, Cantonese slang for “secret bounty of the triad”), unfolds its plot around a rumor about one triad offering a secret bounty to murder the leader of its opposing triad. A corrupt policeman is assigned by the first triad to stop the spreading of the rumor and to prevent the event which could result in absolute mayhem among the triad societies. By the end of the film, the rumor about the assassination turns out to be a conspiracy by a senior triad boss, Mr. Hung, to eradicate the disobedient members of the gang before his scheduled return to Macao after decades of absence. The surname “Hung” of the returning big boss is the homonym of “Red” in Chinese, his image as the insidious puppet master behind the whole gang warfare is generally associated with the Communist Party of China, although Johnnie To personally denied any serious message in the film (Teo 2007: 92). Regardless, the tragic ending of the triad-serving policeman has clearly demonstrated the motif of a dark fatalism which has occurred in many *Milkyway Image* productions (Pang 2002; Pun 2006; Teo 2007). “There is the near-religious devotion to fatalism that marks To’s action films,” as Teo (2007: 92) noted. The frustration of being in a powerless position to accept the power/regime transfer arrangement is revealed through a character in *The Longest Nite* saying, “we are like bouncing balls; it isn’t up to us to choose where to go or when to

stop.”

Eight years later the film *Exiled* (2006) is again set in 1998 Portuguese Macao and is about gang warfare. Movie fans have even matched all the characters in the film with the different political forces in Hong Kong and Macao according to their respective personalities and interrelationships, such as the Hong Kong SAR government, the Macao SAR government, the Hong Kong Pan-democracy camp, etc. The PRC central government, again in this film, is presumably represented by a tyrant-like triad boss. This interesting match-up is in all probability over-interpretation. However, the motif of fatalism and the political allusions are beyond doubt. In *The Longest Nite* the fatalism in the protagonist’s powerlessness was expressed by self-ridicule (depicting himself as a bouncing ball). In *Exiled*, however, the fatalism is conveyed through the disorientation of the protagonists as they repeatedly asked each other “Where to go?”, and constantly decided their actions by flipping a coin. After a *blood-soaked* gang war, the protagonists start their journey of exile driving a red car with an oil leak. The striking car number plate “MF 97-99” clearly indicates that this is a story about the handovers of Hong Kong and Macao and the breakdown of the car seemingly alludes to the economic downturn or even the stalled democratic process in the Hong Kong SAR, as it is not this problem that afflicts the Macao SAR.





Figure 3-4 Stills from *Exiled* (2006): The fatalistic coin-flipping and the broken-down car with the plate “MF97-99”

In fact, having been economically overshadowed by Hong Kong for decades, Macao has witnessed high speed economic growth in its post-handover era largely because of the preferential policy of the PRC with Macao SAR overtaking Hong Kong in *per capita* GDP in 2006 as mentioned earlier in this paper. Coincidentally, it was also the year when *Isabella* and *Exiled* – the two Hong Kong films specifically set in Portuguese Macao – were released. After these two films, it seems that the dismal, disorderly colonial Macao has disappeared in Hong Kong films. Instead, a post-handover Macao SAR is portrayed as a prosperous, exciting gaming resort of the PRC, as in the light-hearted love stories of *Look for a Star* (2009) and *Poker King* (2010). Both of the casino-themed films were publicly screened in Mainland China with official permission in the year 2009 to commemorate the ten years anniversary of Macao’s reunification.

Macao SAR: the Gaming Resort of the PRC

The gaming industry is usually used as an umbrella term for casino gambling, horse or greyhound racing, and lotteries. However, in the PRC the word “gaming” (*Bo Cai*) is primarily used as a euphemism for gambling (*Du Bo*) when praising the spectacular achievement of the “casino economy” in Macao SAR. As a socialist country, gambling is strictly prohibited in the PRC while in neighboring Hong Kong, casinos are also illegal and the only legal form of gambling is horse racing run by the Jockey Club. Early in the 1980s, the expression “dancing and horse-racing will continue” was frequently quoted from the PRC cadres as a promise to allow Hong Kong people to maintain their capitalist life style under the “one country, two systems.” The casino business in Macao has also been unaffected by the transfer of sovereignty.

Gambling has been legalised in Macao by Portuguese administration since

1847 as a means to compensate the revenue loss in trading caused by the establishment of Hong Kong as a British colony in 1842 (Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau Macao SAR 2011). The Portuguese had built their settlement in Macao as early as the 16th century, but it was not until the late 19th century that Macao had officially become a colony of Portugal. In the wake of the 1842 Nanjing Treaty, which turned Hong Kong into a British colony, Portugal signed the Sino-Portuguese Treaty of Amity and Commerce (a.k.a. Treaty of Peking) with the governing Chinese authority (the Qing Dynasty at the time) in 1887. The sovereignty of Macao was officially ceded to Portugal until the handover on December 20, 1999, again following the precedent of Hong Kong's handover in July 1, 1997. As Hong Kong had become the major trading port between China and Europe since the Opium War (1839-42), Macao had long been overshadowed by Hong Kong's economic status. Also, due to its lack of natural resources, Macao has had to engage in illegal *coolie* trafficking (Yun 2008) as well as legalised gambling activities to support its local economy. Therefore, Macao had become known worldwide as the "Monte Carlo of the East" or, sometimes, the "Casablanca of the East" and as "a decadent 'city of sin'" (Porter 1993).

Surprisingly, Macao's gambling business boomed after it reunited with the PRC. According to the Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau Macao SAR (2011), more than 70 per cent of the Macao SAR's total fiscal revenue in 2009 was generated from the gaming tax. This number was approximately 30 per cent for several decades before the handover (W. M. Lam 2010). Generally speaking, there are two major causes that have led to the rapid development of Macao's casino economy – the ending of the monopoly on casino industry in 2002 by Macao SAR, and the implementation of the Individual Visit Scheme since July 2003 by the PRC central government. The *Sociedade de Turismo e Diversões de Macau* (STDM) enjoyed the monopoly rights to all gambling business in Macao since 1962. When the STDM's monopoly license expired, in 2002 the new SAR government granted six new casino operating concessions to other gaming companies, including those world famous companies from Las Vegas such as Wynn, Sands, Galaxy, Venetian and MGM. Since then, the number of casinos in Macao increased from 11 in 2002 to 21 in 2006 (McGowan 2008), and as of May 2011, a total of 33 casinos is in operation according to official statistics (Gaming Inspection and Coordination Bureau Macao SAR 2011).

Apart from the ending of the monopoly system in the gambling business, the casino economy boom in Macao can largely be attributed to the PRC's introduction of the Individual Visit Scheme in 2003, which allows Mainland residents to travel to Hong Kong and Macao on an individual basis. This scheme is intended to boost the tourism of Hong Kong and Macao which had suffered greatly from the 2003 SARS epidemic. This scheme has provided a steady flow of visitors from mainland China to Macao and thus fueled the rapid expansion of Macao's casino business. By allowing the residents from the socialist Mainland to engage in the

gambling activities in Macao, the Central Government reveals an attitude of *acquiescence* to Macao's status as the special gaming resort of the PRC. More importantly, the relaxed traveling policy demonstrates the Central Government's generous support for Macao's economic prosperity in an effort to build it into a positive showcase of the "one country, two systems" formula.

In the context of the booming casino economy of Macao and the burgeoning film market in the Mainland, the agile Hong Kong filmmakers soon set aside the gloominess about the "existential crisis" or political allusions (as in aforementioned *Isabella* and *Exiled*). They started to make financially rewarding films about Macao specially tailored for the Mainland market. In July 2008, seven months after the opening of MGM Grand Paradise in Macao, Hong Kong Media Asia Films started to shoot its biggest production of that year – *Look for a Star* at this spectacular resort casino. This is a romantic comedy about a young billionaire and a female dancer who works as a part-time dealer at his casino. This modern version Cinderella story is said to be adapted from the real relationship between the Macao's "Casino King" Stanley Ho and his fourth wife. Ho is the founder of STDN who had monopolised Macao casino business for four decades until 2002 and still the owner of nearly half of the casinos in Macao as of the year 2011.

Released for the movie season of Valentine's Day and the Chinese New Year in 2009, *Look for a Star* was a box-office hit with revenue of 113 million RMB (about US\$17.65 million) on the strength of the budget of less than 40 million RMB (about US\$ 6.25 million). Such a handsome reward should mainly be ascribed to the soaring development of the Mainland film market as a whole. Since the commercialisation reform of the film industry in 2002, the annual box office is increasing at an average rate of about 25 per cent every year. In the year 2009 alone, the increase was 40 percent and the total revenue had reached a new record of 6 billion RMB (about US\$937.5 million).



Figure 5 DVD cover of *Look for a Star* (2009) A modern Cinderella story takes place in a Macao casino

Being a co-produced film catering to the Mainland market, *Look for a Star* succeeded in weakening its casino theme but highlighting the tourist attractions in Macao. In fact, this film was officially supported by the Macao Government Tourist Office and works perfectly as a tourism promotion film for Macao by presenting both the splendid brand new resort casino, MGM Grand, and the historic Portuguese architecture, such as the Old Ladies' House inscribed on the World Heritage List by UNESCO, the Guia Lighthouse and the Coloane village.

This "scenic film" strategy may be seen as from the tradition of eroticizing Macao in Hong Kong films from the 1950's. In 1959, the Cantonese romance *The Missing Cinderella* (1959), remade from the 1953 classic *Roman Holidays* starring Audrey Hepburn, was shot in Macao to tell a love story between a journalist and a young woman who fled from her rich family in Hong Kong. The local landmarks such as The Ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral and San Man Lo (a.k.a. Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro) were featured in the film to represent the Portuguese-administered Macao as a fascinating colonial town, an exotic holiday resort for rich people from Hong Kong. Half a century later, the love story continues to

be repeated in different ways, but only the targeted audience has changed to the mainland residents who have recently been granted rights to travel to Macao on an individual basis.

In terms of film style, *Look for a Star*, though co-produced with the Mainland, is still a continuation of the Hong Kong urban romance from its golden times in the 1980s. However, *Poker King*, another Macao casino-themed Hong Kong film in 2009 is obviously a deviation from the Hong Kong action gambling genre tradition. This genre has become very popular in Hong Kong since the early 1980s. It reached its full bloom by the end of 1980s with the famous *God of Gamblers* (1989), with over ten sequels and spin-offs throughout the 1990s. As the Hong Kong filmmakers started to make films for the Mainland market, the gambling genre has disappeared from the scene for quite a while. Taking advantage of the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Macao's handover, *Poker King*, as a Hong Kong film with a major gambling element, was officially screened in Mainland movie theaters. However, despite the word "poker" in the movie title, the whole movie does not elaborate on the dazzling magic-like gambling skills as it used to do in the 1990s. Instead, it focuses on the robust casino economy of Macao through relatively insignificant commercial wars between several casino runners and their ambitions of building more entertainment facilities in Macao to attract tourists worldwide. While *Look for the Star* promotes itself by claiming to be loosely adapted from "Casino King" Stanley Ho's love story, *Poker King* has even cast the celebrity Josie Ho Chiu-Yi, daughter of Stanley Ho, in the role of a casino CEO.



Figure 6 Still from *Poker King* (2009): actress Josie Ho Chiu-Yi, daughter of Macao casino magnate Stanley Ho



Figure 7-8 Stills from *Poker King* (2009): Planning for New Gambling Resort City

From the dark, violent colonial Macao in *The Longest Nite* (1998) to the vigorously developing Macao SAR in *Poker King* (2009) – about a decade – the evolution of Macao’s image through Hong Kong films has in a way reflected the process of how it has become “a diligent child of China’s socialist capitalism in the twenty-first century” (V. Lee 2009: 72). Moreover, it helps explain the 2009 easy passage of state security law to fulfil Basic Law Article 23 in Macao, while the legislation of the same law has resulted in Hong Kong’s 2003 July 1 protest and has been shelved indefinitely since then. As a Macao legislator pointed out, “When the Portuguese left Macau, people were hoping for a change and saw that change [in] Beijing. In Hong Kong people feared change” (Bezlova 2009: n.pag.).

On the issue of the anti-treason law – Article 23 – Macao has set a role model of prioritizing “one country” (the PRC state) over “two systems” for Hong Kong. Meanwhile, its spectacular economic performance based on the gambling industry, which is officially prohibited in the socialist Mainland, has to certain extent illustrated how the “two systems” practice works. In this sense, to the PRC central government, Macao serves as an exemplary demonstration of the “one country, two systems” arrangement to persuade Taiwan with a case for reunification. How-

ever, Taiwan rejects the proposal not because of the doubt about its feasibility, but on the ground that it, holds that the “one country” in “one country, two systems” should be the Republic of China which was founded in 1912 and retreated to Taiwan in 1949 the founding of the PRC on mainland China.

3 Taiwan: “One China, Different Interpretations”

The expression “One China, Different Interpretations” is also known as “the 1992 Consensus,” although it is more like a mutual understanding in a strict sense as there are still different views about defining “China.” The so-called consensus is used to describe the outcome of a meeting held in Hong Kong in 1992 between two semi-official organisations from both sides of the Strait – the mainland China-based Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) and the ROC-based Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF). At the meeting, both sides have agreed on the “One China principle” that both mainland China and Taiwan belong to one sovereign country – China as “a historical, geographical, cultural and racial entity” (from *The White Paper: Relations Across the Taiwan Strait published by the ROC government on Taiwan* in 1994, as cited from Cabestan 1996: 1263). However, there is an irreconcilable conflict in the definition of “China” – both the PRC on the Mainland and the ROC on Taiwan claim to be the sole legitimate representative of Chinese sovereignty. This insistence on a “one China principle” and the difference in their respective interpretations of “one China” across the Taiwan Strait have been captured in three post-1997 Hong Kong films on major Taiwan political issues, *Black Gold* (1997), *Ballistic* (2008) and *Prince of Tears* (2009). Moreover, though limited in number, these three films have sufficiently demonstrated Hong Kong’s connection to, and concern with, Taiwan as a Chinese territory, and in a way, revealed Hong Kong’s own stand on the complicated problem of the divided sovereignty of China.

***Prince of Tears*: 1950s “White Terror” in Taiwan under Martial Law**

Produced by Hong Kong film director/producer Fruit Chan and directed by Hong Kong director Yonfan, *Prince of Tears* (2009) tells a tragic story set in 1950s’ Taiwan clouded by anti-communist “white terror.” Because of its sensitive topic, it is impossible for *Prince of Tears* to be screened at the mainland Chinese theatres. Thus, the promotion of this film has adopted a strategy of using the international film festival circuit as its springboard for the international audience as an art house movie. Following the precedent of the Taiwanese movie *A City of Sadness* (1989, dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien) about the Taiwan 2-28 massacre in 1947 and which is the first Chinese-language film to win the Golden Lion award at the Venice Film Festival, *Prince of Tears* premiered in competition at the 66th Venice Film Festival in 2009 as a Hong Kong-Taiwan co-production. Later, it was chosen as

Hong Kong's entry for the foreign-language category of the 82nd Academy Awards, which resulted in the denouncement of the film's status as a Taiwanese domestic film. Therefore, its US\$ 306,000 subsidy from Taiwan's Government Information Office was taken back (Shackleton 2009). Although the film failed to win any prizes at the festivals, it has become prominent as one of the very few films to touch on the politically sensitive topic of Taiwan under martial law.

Taiwan was ceded to Japan in 1895 by the last Chinese feudal dynasty, Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). After fifty years of being a Japanese colony, Taiwan was returned by Japan to the Republic of China in 1945. Four years later in 1949, the ROC under the governing Chinese Nationalist Party, the *Kuomintang* (KMT), withdrew from mainland China to Taiwan after the Chinese civil war. The above-mentioned 2-28 Massacre of 1947, in which thousands were killed or imprisoned, was an outbreak of accumulated tension between the local inhabitants of Taiwan and the newly arrived KMT administration. In the aftermath of the incident, the KMT government declared martial law in Taiwan in 1948 which has remained in effect for four decades until 1987. The award-winning *A City of Sadness* (1989) was the first film to take up the once political taboo of "the 2-28 Massacre" as its subject after martial law was repealed.

While *A City of Sadness* recalls the traumatic memory of the local inhabitants of Taiwan under the KMT government, *Prince of Tears* represents the life of the KMT military officers during the first several years after retreating to Taiwan. The plot unfolds through the eyes of an eight-year-old girl whose happy family is torn apart when her father, a KMT Air Force officer, is prosecuted and then executed for communist espionage. The story is set in 1954 in a KMT military dependents' village (*juan cun*) – the provisional housing for KMT soldiers and their dependents from mainland China. In fact, a great many Taiwanese celebrities have grown up in these military dependents' villages, including the leading Taiwanese filmmakers Ang Lee, Hou Hsiao-hsien and Edward Yang De-chang. These supposedly temporary villages have actually ended up as permanent settlements, as the KMT had never realised its goal of resuming its governance on Chinese mainland. In the film, the old KMT General refused to have his garden tended in the hope of returning to the Mainland within a couple of years. However, the frustration of this unrealised hope is illustrated through a sorrowful scene later in the film when the General orders his soldiers to clean up the desolate garden, saying "It seems we are not going back soon."

Moreover, in contrast to the Taiwan-made *A City of Sadness*, which has focused on the national identity confusion of the Taiwanese local inhabitants during the years of Taiwan's transfer from fifty years of colonisation by Japan to the authoritarian governing of the KMT-led ROC government, the Hong Kong-made *Prince of Tears* has brought the attention to the plight of the exiled ROC government. In order to create an authentic feeling of the 1950s' Taiwan, the prologue of *Prince of Tears* employed the standard government propaganda newsreel from

that particular era. This film clip features the 1950s ROC government radio propaganda about the progress of construction in Taiwan and the political *slogan of “counter-attack and regaining control over Chinese mainland” (fan gong da lu)*. The most conspicuous image is a black-and-white map of China marked with the four Chinese characters “*Zhong Hua Ming Guo*”, (the Republic of China) with a subtitle consisting of lyrics from the National Anthem of the ROC. The territory of a “unified China” includes not only Taiwan and mainland China, but also Mongolia, which used to be ruled by China during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), and then the ROC founded in 1911. However, Mongolia had unilaterally declared secession from the ROC in 1924 under the influence of the former Soviet Union. The independence of Mongolia has been recognised by the newly founded communist PRC since 1949, “presumably under pressure from the Soviet Union” (Harding 1993: 679) but never by the ROC regime. However, the ROC government in the 1950s, though having retreated to Taiwan, insisted on its own conception of China which included Taiwan, Mainland China and all of Siberia and much of Soviet Central Asia, as the map from the film clip shows. In fact, such maps of “the Republic of China” were printed in high school textbooks in 1950s Taiwan (Harding 1993), demonstrating the ROC government’s commitment to the territorial integrity of China, though this was slightly different from the PRC government’s version.



Figure 9: Still from *Prince of Tears* (2009): A map of the Republic of China Shown in the Newsreels of 1950s' Taiwan

However, since the ROC lost its United Nation seat of “China” to the PRC in 1971, the major concern of the KMT administration of the ROC is no longer to regain control of the Mainland, but how to retain its alternative interpretation of

China under pressure from both the PRC's reunification under "one country, two systems" proposal, and the local Democratic Progress Party's (DPP) "Taiwan independence" movement. During the 1990s, the ruling KMT party was facing severe criticism with political corruption and gangster involvement (known as "black gold", *Hei Jin*). This has led to a split of factions within the KMT and then resulted in the KMT's defeat by the pro-independence DPP in the three-way presidential election in 2000, marking the end of the KMT's one-party ruling of the ROC (Taiwan). In the 2004 election, the reunited KMT was defeated by the DPP again by a very narrow margin after the "3-19 Shooting Incident", an attempted assassination of Chen Shuibian – the DPP leader, Taiwan President (in office 2000-2008) – the day before the election, which was widely suspected to be staged as a strategic maneuver to support the DPP's campaign. However, during his second term of presidency, Chen Shui-bian of the DPP was involved in a series of scandals, which led to an anti-Chen Shuibian campaign in 2006. Soon after his presidency ended in 2008 and the KMT took office again, Chen was eventually convicted and imprisoned for bribery and corruption. Since the democratisation of Taiwan, the dramatic political evolution of Taiwan over the last two decades is condensed in two post-1997 Hong Kong films, *Black Gold* (1997) and *Ballistic* (2008). Through the two films, Hong Kong filmmakers have demonstrated their deep concern for Taiwan as an entity within what could be termed "Greater China."

***Black Gold* and *Ballistic*: Political Corruption and the 2004 Election Farce in Democratic Taiwan**

Strictly speaking, *Black Gold* (alternative English title: *Island of Greed* 1997) is not a post-1997 Hong Kong film. Although it was released in December 1997 after the handover, the production of *Black Gold* had started in 1996, the year when cross-strait tension mounted after Beijing conducted a missile test near Taiwan's coastline before Taiwan's first direct presidential election – "the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis" (Bush 2005: 210). The story is set in 1995 as an actual Taiwanese television news report on Beijing negotiator Tang Shubei's visit to Taiwan, which is used at the beginning of the film to provide the background to the story. As indicated in the film title, the story is the disclosure of Taiwan's "black gold politics" in the mid-1990's as the Taiwanese mafia – "black gangs" (*Hei Bang*) – infiltrated the political domain, while the corrupt politicians accumulated money through their connections to the gangsters. The main plot follows a government agent in the Ministry of Justice investigating a gang-leader-turned-politician over the course of the Taipei legislative election campaign.

As a Taiwan-themed political thriller from the perspective of Hong Kong filmmakers, *Black Gold* is not a story of intrigue behind a struggle for political power, but is filled with spectacular Hong Kong-styled action scenes, gun-battles, etc. Based on the stereotyped characterisation of the upright inspector and the unscrupulous gang leader (both played by Hong Kong film stars), the film revealed

an obvious anti-Taiwan-independence political leaning. It explicitly compares the corrupt antagonist in the film to the pro-independence Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui (in office 1988-2000) by candidly displaying Lee's picture along with the gang leader's wife proudly commenting on how much her husband and the President look alike. On the other hand, the brief appearance of the Minister of Justice is obviously based on the real figure of Ma Ying-jeou (the present Taiwan President since 2008), who had launched an effective anti-corruption campaign and major gang-sweep operations while he was in the post of the Minister of Justice from 1993 to 1996 (when the film is set). Unlike the Taiwan-born Lee Teng-hui, who is an advocate for the Taiwanese Localisation movement, Hong Kong-born Ma Ying-jeou, whose father had moved from mainland China to Taiwan in 1949 as a high-ranked KMT officer, is a supporter of "One China, Different interpretations." Taiwan President, Ma Ying-jeou has called for the terms "the mainland" or "the other side of the strait" to refer to the PRC, rather than using "China", as he believes, according to the ROC Constitution, that mainland China is also part of ROC territory (W. Fu 2011).

In fact, while condemning the political corruption in Taiwan, *Black Gold* expresses genuine concerns about the ROC under the KMT administration. Through the words of the protagonist:

Corruption had caused our defeat in the civil war and we were forced to retreat to Taiwan. Now they are again messing up this beautiful island. If they collapsed Taiwan, where else can we retreat to? One step behind is only the ocean.

To some extent, this criticism did soon come true. As noted earlier, about two years after *Black Gold* was released, the KMT party was defeated by the DPP in the 2000 Taiwan presidential election and again in 2004, marking the end of its five decades of one-party dominance in Taiwan. With the change of administration from the KMT to the DPP, Taiwan has also experienced great changes which reflect the conflict between the camps of Taiwan independence and "One China."

In the film *Black Gold*, there is a long shot of the ROC national flag raising ceremony in front of the Memorial Hall, followed by the close-up of the inscription *Da Zhong Zhi Zheng* on the main gate of the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Park. Unexpectedly, these scenes have become a precious record of Taiwanese history, as the inscription has since been removed and replaced in 2007 during the DPP administration (2000-2008) as part of the "de-Chiang-ification" effort to contain the influence of the KMT.



Figure 10 Still from *Black Gold* (1997): the ROC national flag raising ceremony in front of the National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall



Figure 11 Still from *Black Gold* (1997): Close-up of the inscription Da Zhong Zhi Zheng (“Great, Central, Perfect, Upright”)

During the “de-*Chiang*-ification” campaign, in the name of eliminating the cult of the personal worship about Chiang Kai-shek, the former ROC president and KMT party leader, his picture was removed from the new Taiwan currency in 2000. Moreover, the Chiang Kai-shek International Airport, opened in 1970s, was renamed Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport. Most of the streets, buildings, schools, and organisations named “Chungcheng” (an alternative name of Chiang Kai-shek) were also renamed. The National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall was changed into “National Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall”, while the inscription

Da Zhong Zhi Zheng (meaning “Great, Central, Perfect, Upright”, the ancient Chinese phrase from which Chiang Kai-shek’s other name originated) was replaced with *Zi You Guang Chang*, (“Liberty Square”) from 2007.

Although after Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT was elected to the presidency in 2008, the name “National Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall” was restored soon after. However, the new inscription “Liberty Square” was retained. Beside its appearance in the above-mentioned film *Black Gold* (1997), the last time the original “*Da Zhong Zhi Zheng*” plaque appeared in a Hong Kong film is in *Ballistic* (2008), a political thriller based on the controversial “3-19 Shooting Incident” before the 2004 Taiwan presidential election.



Figure 12 Still from *Ballistic* (2008): People rallied near the Da Zhong Zhi Zheng Gate in 2004 demanding the truth about the “3-19 Shooting Incident” of Taiwan presidential election

The “3-19 Shooting Incident”, also known as the “3-19 Presidential Assassination Attempt”, took place on March 19, 2004, one day before Taiwan’s presidential election. The DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian, who was running for his second term of the presidency, survived a gunshot wound to his abdomen while he was campaigning in Tainan, a southern city of Taiwan, with his vice president. The shooting incident won Chen Shui-bian decisive sympathy in the election and the next day he was re-elected as President by very narrow margin. Rallies and protests continued for weeks challenging the election result and demanding the truth about the so-called “assassination attempt.” Although the official investigation on the shooting was closed in 2005 without a convincing conclusion, there continued to be suspicions about the incident being staged and faked.

The Hong Kong film *Ballistic* simulates the 3-19 Shooting Incident based on speculation about Chen Shui-bian faking of the incident. Starting with the police investigation on a seemingly irrelevant case on the illegal *possession of firearms*, *Ballistic* simulates the “3-19 Shooting Incident” without using real names. It boldly depicts a political fraud about a presidential candidate masterminding an assassination attempt of his vice-president in order to blame his opponent, and then faking a gun wound on the candidate himself when the vice-president survived the assassination due to a half-filled bullet. The film ends in an anti-corruption demonstration two years after the election, which is based on the real event of the “Besiege the Presidential Office” demonstration – the climax of the 2006 “Million Voices against Corruption, President Chen Must Go” campaign (Parfitt 2007: 201). The campaign has in a way led to Chen Shui-bian’s charges and conviction of bribery and corruption immediately after his presidential term finished in 2008.

Since in real life the investigation of the “3-19 Shooting Incident” has been inconclusive, the supposition in *Ballistic* therefore is taken as a probable explanation of the “cold case.” More important than disclosing the truth, this Hong Kong film actually is a demonstration of an anti-DPP posture, which to some extent, is equivalent to anti-Taiwan independence. This political standing is consistent with the PRC’s uncompromising position on the Taiwan issue, and thus has gained the film access to the Mainland.

Ballistic was released in Hong Kong in November 2008, six months after Chen Shui-bian stepped down and Ma Ying-jeou of the KMT was sworn into office as President in May 2008. Later in January 2009, it was screened in a limited number of cities in Taiwan, under an alternative Chinese title *Jiang Hu Qing* (literally: *Affection of the Grassroots Community*) to reduce its political sensitivity. However, it was not until April 2010 that *Ballistic* was released on the Mainland, more than one year after its scheduled release date, due to censorship regulations. While the film was indeed unsuccessful in terms of its box office revenue in Hong Kong and Taiwan, it was generally received positively in the Mainland because of the rarity of the political thriller genre there.

Considering the sensitive subject of the film, *Ballistics* was finally accepted by the Mainland censors presumably under the influence of two events. First, the aforementioned conviction of Chen Shui-bian; in September 2009, Chen Shui-bian received a life sentence (later reduced to twenty years) for embezzlement, money-laundering and bribery. The legal results of Chen’s corruption have made *Ballistic* appear to be less politically biased than otherwise would be the case. Second and more importantly, is the unprecedented development of cross-strait relationships during the Ma Ying-jeou administration in Taiwan since 2008. *Ballistics* was screened on the Mainland while Taiwan and the PRC were in the final stage of negotiation of an epoch-breaking bilateral trade agreement – the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (“ECFA”) – following similar examples of the PRC’s agreements with Hong Kong and Macao, (the Closer Economic Part-

nership Arrangement or “CEPA” signed in 2003). EFCA was signed in June 2010 and took effect in September that year.

Although Taiwan disapproves of the “one country, two systems” model practised in the Hong Kong and Macao SARs on the ground of the asymmetric central-SAR power configuration, it did not reject the economic integration as part of “Greater China” under “One China, Different Integrations.” As for Hong Kong, despite the local debate about whether the priority of “one country” has undermined “two systems” and Hong Kong’s high degree of autonomy, it shares the PRC’s anti-Taiwan independence stance. This is not only because of the fear that Taiwan independence would threaten the security of the Taiwan Straits, but more because of Hong Kong people’s residual affection towards the ROC. Historically speaking, the ROC is the first Republic regime of China after the 1911 Revolution ended the 4,000 years monarchy. Although it had lost control of mainland China since 1949 the founding of the communist PRC, as aforementioned, the ROC has been the legitimate representation of China at the United Nations till 1971. In fact, many Hong Kong residents or their parents have moved out of the Mainland to avoid the Communist rule. Even until the 1990s, to some of these Hong Kong people, the ROC is the more legitimate representation of China, rather than the PRC.

In fact, Hong Kong’s affection towards the unrecognised ROC and its neutral stand towards the “two Chinas” can be perfectly illustrated in the 1990 Hong Kong comedy *Her Fatal Way*. The film tells a story about a female Mainland police officer on a mission in Hong Kong. In this film, the Mainland communist was portrayed as the uncouth alien while the KMT veteran of the ROC was introduced as the father of a Royal Hong Kong police officer. In a breakfast table scene at the Hong Kong police officer’s home, the triangular relationship among Hong Kong and the “two Chinas” is shown as the Mainland communist and the veteran KMT are both in their respective military uniforms to challenge each other, while the Hong Kong police officer, in his own uniform, sits between them trying to mediate. As the two are arguing about using the chopsticks with left or right hand (a metaphor for the leftist and rightist ideologies), the Hong Kong policeman takes up knife and fork in each hand and says “I am adept with both hands.” A noteworthy detail in this scene is that in the background, the portraits of all four presidents of the KMT party (also the ROC) are hanging on the wall of the Royal Hong Kong police officer’s home.



Figure 13 Still from *Her Fatal Way* (1990) the breakfast table scene: the Hong Kong police officer (middle), his father – a veteran KMT military officer (left), and the communist cadre from Mainland China (right).

Historically speaking, Hong Kong films have been enjoying preferential access to the Taiwan market as domestic products since the 1950s despite Hong Kong's status as a British colony and a SAR of the PRC. Since the 2004 implementation of the CEPA, the PRC has also granted domestic status to Hong Kong-Mainland co-productions and waived the import quota on non-co-produced Hong Kong films. In this sense, Hong Kong films are technically being treated as domestic products in both Mainland China and Taiwan, as both the PRC and the ROC government hold to the "one China" principle and Hong Kong as part of China. Therefore, regarding the Taiwan issue, Hong Kong may not be a supporter of "reunification" which, to a certain extent, means Taiwan's capitulation to the PRC. However, Hong Kong has demonstrated a clear posture against Taiwan independence through its films. Unlike the political implication of the PRC's "reunification", Hong Kong's anti-secession stance is more out of belief in ethnic Chinese kinship. Made up of the Chinese cultural and "blood tie", this kinship transcends the political discrepancies and territorial delimitations across the Taiwan Strait and serves the basis of the national "Greater China."

Conclusion

This paper is about Hong Kong's filmic representation of Macao and Taiwan, the two other Chinese societies outside Mainland China. Instead of simply equating "China" with the nation-state of the PRC as defined in the "one country, two systems" policy, I have drawn on the abstract concept of "Greater China" to redefine the Chineseness of Hong Kong cinema. In his book *Contingent States: Greater China and Transnational Relations*, Callahan (2004: xxi) argued that "Greater China is the product of a contingent network of relations in local, national, regional, global, and transnational space" and suggests a way of seeing Greater China as a set of "heterotopias" which are "not the clean or pure norms of the social constructivists, they are multiple, and thus involved in struggle and politics" (22). If the ultimate goal of "one country, two systems" policy – a politically unified China under the regime of the PRC – may sound like a utopia/dystopia, Callahan's heuristic use of the Foucaudian term "heterotopias" is helpful in understanding the complexity and contingency of Greater China. With the increased economic integrations among Mainland China and other Chinese societies such as Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, these multiple "heterotopias" of Greater China are actually visualised through the images of the Chinese diasporas in Hong Kong films: from the dark, disorderly colonial Macao to prosperous and pliant Macao SAR; from the anti-Communist Taiwan under martial law to the democratised Taiwan holding up an alternative interpretation of "one China". By examining the various Chinesenesses outside mainland China through the post-1997 Hong Kong films, I argue that Hong Kong's uniqueness lies in its composite/cosmopolitan Chineseness. At the nexus of the separated Chinese diasporic communities, Hong Kong cinema is actually demonstrating a broader concern for an abstract "China" transcending the political national boundary of the PRC.

Hilary Hongjin He is a lecturer at Wuyi University, China. She has recently submitted her PhD thesis on Hong Kong cinema at the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney. She has published on communication, media and culture in *Global Media Journal*, *Asian Cinema* as well as some academic journals in China.

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Filmography

English Title	Year	Pinyin Title	Chinese Title	Director
2000 AD	2000	<i>Gong Yuan 2000</i>	公元 2000	Gordon Chan Kar-Seung
A City of Sadness	1989	<i>Bei Qing Cheng Shi</i>	悲情城市	Hou Hsiao-hsien
After This Our Exile	2006	<i>Fu Zi</i>	父子	Patrick Tam Kar Ming
At the end of Daybreak	2009	<i>Xin Mo</i>	心魔	<i>Ho Yuhang</i>
Ballistic	2008	<i>Dan Dao</i>	弹道	Lawrence Ah Mon (a.k.a. Lawrence Lau Kwok Cheong)
Black Gold (a.k.a. Island of Greed)	1997	<i>Hei Jin</i>	黑金	Michael Mak Dong-kit
Casino	1998	<i>Hao Jiang Feng Yun</i>	濠江风云	Billy Tang Hin-Shing
Curse of the Golden Flowers	2006	<i>Man Cheng Jin Dai Huang Jin Jia,</i>	满城尽带黄金甲	Zhang Yimou
Election 2: Value Peace Most	2006	<i>Hei She Hui 2: Yi He Wei Gui</i>	黑社会 2: 以和为贵	Johnnie To Kei-fung
Exiled	2006	<i>Fang Zhu</i>	放逐	Johnnie To Kei-fung
Fu Bo	2003	<i>Fu Bo</i>	福伯	Wong Ching-Po
God of Gamblers	1989	<i>Du Sheng</i>	赌神	Wong Jing,
Her Fatal Ways	1990	<i>Biao Jie Ni Hao Ye</i>	表姐你好嘢	Alfred Cheung Kin Ting
Isabella	2006	<i>Yi Sha Bei La</i>	伊莎贝拉	Edmond Pang Ho-Cheung
Lola Rennt (Run Lora Run)	1998	<i>Luo La Kuai Pao</i>	罗拉快跑	Tom Tykwer
Look for a Star	2009	<i>You Long Xi Feng</i>	游龙戏凤	Andrew Lau Wai-Keung
Painted Skin	2008	<i>Hua Pi</i>	画皮	Gordon Chan Kar-Seung
Poker King	2009	<i>Pu Ke Wang</i>	扑克王	Chan Hing-Kai & Janet Chun
Prince of Tears	2009	<i>Lei Wang Zi</i>	泪王子	Yon Fan
Protégé	2007	<i>Men Tu</i>	门徒	Derek Yee Tung-Shing
Rain Dogs	2006	<i>Tai Yang Yu</i>	太阳雨	Ho Yu-Hang
Roman Holidays	1953	<i>Luo Ma Jia Ri</i>	罗马假日	William Wyler
The Banquet	2006	<i>Ye Yan</i>	夜宴	Feng Xiaogang
The Eye	2002	<i>Jian Gui</i>	见鬼	Oxide Pang Chun & Danny Pang
The Longest Nite	1998	<i>An Hua</i>	暗花	Johnnie To Kei-fung & Wai Ka-Fai
The Missing Cinderella	1959	<i>Jin Zhi Yu Ye</i>	金枝玉叶	Ng Wui
The Truth About Jane and Sam	1999	<i>Zhen Xin Hua</i>	真心话	Derek Yee Tung-Sing
Too Many Ways to Be Number One	1997	<i>Yi Ge Zi Tou De Dan Sheng</i>	一个字头的诞生	Wai Ka-Fai

Database Documentary: From *Authorship* to *Authoring* in Remediated/Remixed Documentary

By Hart Cohen

Abstract

The engagement with documentary from its inception as a film form is frequently a set of references to documentary auteurs. The names of Flaherty, Grierson, Vertov and later Ivens, Leacock and Rouch are immediate signifiers of whole documentary film practices. These practices have given rise to histories and criticism that have dominated discussion of documentary and provided the foundation for more nuanced thinking about problems of the genre. One of the seminal texts in the field, *Documentary* by Erik Barnouw (1974) celebrates the auteur as the structuring principle for his historical review of documentary. It may be a reflection of the influence of this book, that so much of documentary criticism reflects the auteur approach as a starting point for analysis.

The shift towards a new documentary format, the Database Documentary, challenges the concept of an auteur in its presentation of documentary materials. This format relies on a remediation technique that recalibrates documentary media within new distributive networks supported by the web and enhanced by converged and designed visual and sonic interfaces. The reception modalities are necessarily removed from the familiar forms of projection and presentation of documentary film and television.

The research focus for this paper is how the concept of authorship (the “auteur”) is transformed by the emergence of the relatively new screen format of the database documentary.

The paper reviews some of the more recent examples of Database Documentary, the contexts for their production and the literature on new conceptions of documentary knowledge that may be drawn from these examples. An analysis of the authoring program, *Korsakow* and the documentaries that have been made using its software will demonstrate the route documentary has travelled from authorship to authoring in contemporary media production.

Keywords: Database documentary, documentary film, authorship, remediation

Introduction

As Geert Lovink has written, “We no longer watch films or TV; we watch databases...” (Lovink 2008: 9) In the context of his book, *Video Vortex: Reader Responses to YouTube*, the comment was directed at the proliferate consumption of *YouTube* video – a consumption that had little critical assessment. I begin with this quote because database documentary shares with YouTube the web platforms that are the “common ground” of these types of media practices. Lovink is saying that the web-based media consumption grounded in the database structure is consumed in a manner that distinguishes it from film or TV. Further, this kind of consumption or use of web-based media is substantial and is growing exponentially. We still do watch films and TV but increasingly these media are remediated within web environments.

I intend in this paper to address how this new environment has impacted on long-standing relationships in the production and consumption of screen media and in particular, documentary.

So what is a database documentary? Early scholars in this field such as Lev Manovich and Fabian Wagmister argued in agreement with Lovink that the database is a key model for new media production. It seems they feel this way because the database platform allows for many variations in format that can revolutionize the documentary form. Wagmister in his work, *Modular Visions*,

The triangulation among modern art, Third Cinema, and digital database structures could provide a new model of creation for those searching for a pluralistic, process driven, truly interactive audiovisual medium. This triangle composed of the aspirations of the modern art movements and revolutionary cinema as its base... (Wagmeister 2000)

Database Documentary is a relatively new form of documentary storytelling that uses the combined elements of digital media and on-line platforms. Traditionally, the kind of documentary production linked to Database Documentary is built on a research practice in which access to an archive or other sources of knowledge and information is key. Archives are normally collections of texts, images, letters, and objects, usually in support of an individual's work or legacy or that of a social or public institution. Archival materials can be the core of a documentary production because they provide the evidence for an argument, the germination of a story and illustrations for possible links within the subject of a film. The archive is in effect a kind of potential database – a repository of materials that selectively can form the central motifs of a conventional documentary production. The Database Documentary departs from the conventional documentary in the manner in which it treats the archive to provide resources and structures in order to shape the access to it. In this regard, the role of a Database Documentary producer is closer to a *curator* or designer. The move towards the Database Documentary as the platform of choice suits the contemporary interest in non-linear storytelling enhanced by the web. Writing prior to the emergence of the so-called Web 2.0 or the more ex-

tensive mediatization of the web, Gunther Hartwig wrote, "...The notion of audience interaction and participation is a driving force when creating New Media documentaries" (Hartwig 2001: 7).

My interest in authorship and its transformation within database documentary is strongly linked to the emergence of audience participation and interaction within the narrative structures of the media form. As the web models interactivity, it encourages non-linear forms of interaction such as browsing, linking, sharing and communicating through multiple levels of the production. Database Documentary utilises these aspects of the web and its communicative features to project rich and diverse story elements while proposing varying approaches to how the stories will be accessed and ordered. The following paper introduces Database Documentary and argues, through a contextualisation of its practice, for a new kind of documentary authorship and by extension a new knowledge formation.

Authorship and the Documentary Tradition

The "author" is the anchor of a key concept in media and non-media aesthetics. There is a lengthy history to the concept of the author in film (sometimes referred as "auteur" in respect of the French film critics and theorists who coined the term).¹ The "auteur" was mostly applied to classical Hollywood cinema where directors were made equivalent to authors. The many sceptical accounts of auteur theory, in turn gave prominence to cinematographers and other members of this essentially collaborative art. Despite this, the idea of the author was adapted within the Documentary genre. One of the key textbooks on Documentary used in teaching was Eric Barnouw's *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (1974).² This text was highly influential in defining a Documentary canon and did so in terms of pointing to key individual directors. Their names stood for whole film practices and collapsed aspects of their film practice (editors, cinematographers) into side-bars to the main story of the film's production.

What drives Barnouw's work and other similar histories of the Documentary is the idea that individuals can be the mnemonics to the major cinematic movements that characterize the Documentary in the 20th century. Like auteur-driven film criticism, Barnouw's approach suggests that the logic of these films – their narrative systems and their semiotic strategies are attributable to these individuals.

While this construction of Documentary history may overstate the role of these individuals, it has clearly established a view of Documentary history that has remained intact for over 40 years. This is born out by a more recent text on the history of Documentary but which supplements their influence with a broader account of the Documentary form. Ellis & McLane's "A New History of Documentary Film" suggests that:

Characteristics documentaries have in common that are distinct from other film types (especially from the fiction film) can be thought of in terms of (1) subjects (2)

purposes, viewpoints, or approaches; (3) forms (4) production methods and techniques and (5) the sorts of experience they offer audiences. (Ellis & McLane 2005)

In this text, Ellis and McLane reproduce the canon found in Barnouw as their starting point, but then proceed to develop the range of mediating features of the Documentary tradition (alluded to above). While there are these important shifts in how Documentary is conceived, the authorial presence in both historical and contemporary terms continues to have an impact on the consideration and influence of Documentary.

While the debate around authorship and Documentary continues (see the recent special issue of the online journal, SCAN)³ within the forms that have historically exemplified Documentary production (both audio and audiovisual), my intention here is to look at a new forms of documentary production (the Database Documentary) and in this way offer a comparative view on how authorship and the idea of the “auteur” shifts within this relatively recent innovation.

Recent Examples of Database Documentary

In 2005, Marsha Kinder of University of Southern California’s Department of Cinema and Television led one of the earliest examples of a significant Database Documentary titled, *The Labyrinth Project* <http://college.usc.edu/labyrinth/about.html>. This project has had several upgrades and new iterations since its inception, however continues to use the original model as its foundational conceptual framework. Kinder and members of her team presented the most recent development of *The Labyrinth Project* to the Visible Evidence Conference in Los Angeles (August 2009).

In the current context of remixable *YouTube* era video, questions now arise as to how to distinguish this kind of Database Documentary from the “profusion” of video on the web. Kinder’s work over ten years has been, in her own words, an experiment with the pleasures of beivity, modularity and remix (all attributes of *YouTube* video) with the caveat that her use of these materials must carry both “conceptual power and aesthetic rigor”. (Kinder 2009: 54) The challenge is set by the erosion of a clear line between “grassroots creators and media professionals” (Kinder 2009: 55) – a situation that has vexed many media production teachers at all levels of the academy.⁴ Specifically she equates utopian visions of new media with the technological determinist ideas associated with Marshall McLuhan’s media theories. This view, however, is somewhat reductive of McLuhan’s contribution to our understanding of media – one that anticipated many aspects of the digital media environment. In this regard, expressions of new media utopias can be seen as a form of ideological discourse in the manner that Raymond Williams suggests, “...as a system of representation in the general production of meaning and ideas...” (Williams 1977: 55) in which horizons are bound by both contingent and possible worlds of the future.⁵

Kinder offers a short-hand definition of database narrative that is useful when considering both her work and the key question of authorship. Database narrative is an:

...empowering form that reveals the process by which characters, actions, settings, objects are chosen from an underlying database and recombined to make stories. (Kinder 2009: 58-59)

In the examples of small-scale video works found in the *Labyrinth* project, the Database Documentary narratives are built through re-combinatory acts of media selected from archives to form new and alternative narratives. Through a mix of design, choice and chance (Kinder 2009: 60) the narratives are open to creative impulses by contributors as diverse as media artists, cultural historians or lay persons intent on crafting their story from the archive resources provided. There is a deliberate constraint placed on the narrative frames to enhance the potential for longer narrative pieces. Termed “narrative lures” by Kinder, these longer stories counter the brevity and intensity of the clips or modules to allow for a “greater conceptual power to prevail”. In her presentation to the Visible Evidence conference (August 2009), Kinder illustrated the differing ways the *Labyrinth Project* calibrates its materials (normally delivered over the web) for re-ordering or re-presenting media as immersive large-scale installations in a museum environment. Kinder is clear that the re-ordering for both small and large-scale platforms “raises questions of agency and authorship”. These questions limit the viability of a single-author source for these narrative events. This is an important and distinguishing feature of database documentary separate from the documentary traditions considered by Barnouw and others alluded to above.

Kinder’s examples of database documentary stories from the *Labyrinth Project* frequently blur the lines between the professional media artist’s and the public lay persons’ contributions to the fashioning of a media work. This allows for the interactive dimensions provided through the website to vary the relative intensity of the participatory dimensions. In a large-scale immersive museum installation titled, *Jewish Home-grown History: Immigration, Identity and Inter-marriage*, the participatory dimension is present but understated. The work intends to provide an axis that runs from professional historical and cultural interpretations to the evocation of personal and popular memory. In the now familiar blurring of the professional and the lay versions of history, between private and public histories, the site is intended as a vehicle of empowerment for individuals to challenge official views of history to which they may now wish to respond – to embellish, to correct and to offer alternative views to the public record. Combining a mapping facility in a browsing tool, the user can “author” their immigration journey to the USA through space and time, upload images to support these maps and then see further as the browser provides contextualising materials from archives - newspapers, media clips, commentaries and quotations. Projected onto a large screen in a museum

environment, as Kinder puts it, is a “database documentary narrative on the fly with the user as a performer of history” (Kinder 2009: 62).

This is a key feature of database documentaries that suggests a departure from the traditions of 20th century Documentary associated with the canon established by many critics and historians. The opening of the form to a “live” responding and producing activity by users and audiences, substantially changes the role of the authorial presence in the work.

In other works by Kinder (e.g., Russian Modernism – an on-line constructivist module in which users learn by building the courseware), the participation of lay users is more intense and contributes more extensively to the creation of the work. This work also features a version of video work that is found on *YouTube*. In this regard, this illustrates that *YouTube* can complement the project website where the further contextualisation of the work elaborates extended meanings within the historical context of Russian modernism. This engagement with Russian Modernism presages the link between Dziga Vertov – a classic contributor in the mode of “auteur” to the Documentary tradition and the Database Documentary. The analysis of this connection is taken up by Lev Manovich’s use of Vertov in the *Language of New Media* (2001) (Manovich is in one of Kinder’s segments of interactive lectures on Russian Modernism). With this converged auteur and the practice of “authoring”, the influence of Russian modernism on remix culture comes full circle. It suggests rather than being opposed traditions, the Database Documentary has an reverse legacy in the work of Vertov – the inspiration of Cinéma Verité – a key sub-genre of Documentary production.

As indicated above, Kinder’s most recent Database Documentary is both an on-line exhibition and museum installation. The on-going instance of the *Labyrinth Project* suggests that there can be new possibilities opened up for documentary production within the emergent contexts provided by alternative platforms for the building of media representations. Further, given the mix of levels and intensities of participation, examples of Database Documentary have yet to reach consensus on a standard of presentation. It may be the case that this period for Database Documentary is similar to the late 1800s when a number of cinematic forms competed with each other until the Lumière brothers’ projections enabled a cinematic form to consolidate itself into an industry (Barnouw 1974).

Theoretical and Practical Contexts for the Production of Database Documentary

Database Documentary depends on a number of concepts and media practices associated with the emergence of media forms that relate to digital technologies.

In his earlier work (*The Language of New Media*), Manovich seeks to introduce the idea of a *cinematic language* in the context of digital or what he calls *new media*. It is interesting that in the 8 years since this work was published, cinematic

forms have flourished on the Internet in conjunction with the development of digital media tools. Digital media devices (still/video cameras, mobile phones) allow for a seamless connection to the Internet where sites for sharing filmmaking tools and making media abound. *YouTube* is a direct beneficiary and spur of this step change in the mediatisation of the Internet. The trajectory from a film language theory to remix and software studies bears out a view that Manovich is seeking to fill in the gaps in a historical project of new media practices where no such history currently exists. This leads Manovich to engage largely in a cataloguing activity of new media forms and practices. It was his useful connection between Vertov's film, *Man with a Movie Camera* and conceptions of databases that led to insights in the links between this early 20th century film activity and contemporary web-based media practices.

In the service of contextualising Database Documentary and positioning the concept of authorship within it, this paper now follows two trajectories: first, an analysis of those aspects of the link between film and the web (drawn from Manovich and others) that use a concept of *database* to project new conceptions of documentary knowledge; and second, the analysis of the authoring program, *Korsakow* to demonstrate the route documentary has travelled from authorship to authoring in contemporary media production. The following section reviews four key concepts that assist with understanding the theoretical and practical contexts for the production of Database Documentary and the consequences for authorship: remediation/remixability, interactivity, convergence and participation.

From Remediation to Deep Remixability

If the idea of remediation (Bolter & Grusin 2000) had one key concept, it was to link old and new media in the representation of one medium in another. The serial links of art and media forms over time reminds us of McLuhan's insight that found that every new medium was a re-capitulation of the older one it succeeded. This meant that new media did not supplant old media as much as re-use it for its own designs and purposes. Older media such as radio and video in turn, are found in webcasting and digital media practices. A digital picture is both like and unlike a photograph. A webcasted so-called "reality" sequence on *YouTube* resembles, but is not, a documentary. *Remediation* is defined as a "... borrowing, refashioning, homage through montage, or replacement of one media to another. (<http://readhed.blogspot.com/2005/03/remediation-defined.html>). The idea of *remix* (Manovich 2005) builds on this definition and re-iterates how the Internet can be used to explode the fields of media towards creative purposes such as that termed by Barb Dybwad as *collaborative remixability* (see Manovich 2005). For Manovich the web 2.0 environment pushes remix further:

...Although "deep remixability" has a connection with "remix" as it is usually understood, it has its own distinct mechanisms. Software production environment al-

lows designers to remix not only the content of different media, but also their fundamental techniques, working methods, and ways of representation and expression.

Different media begin to be combined in endless new ways, leading new media hybrids, or, to use a biological metaphor, new “media species”.

What became known as “mediatisation” refers to the Internet’s capacity to incorporate and re-use media forms to stream across platforms and applications. The specific remediation projects may differ widely but it is of importance to the examples of Database Documentaries that the emphasis is frequently placed on *old media* (for example, old photos or Super-8/16mm film). These may be scanned/digitised for use in databases and delivered either on-line or in other forms (locative media or downloadable media). In this regard, most, if not all projects involving old media involve a process of remediation and remix and Database Documentary is one kind of media project that frequently makes use of this process. The implications for authorship should be clear – in re-using media materials, the source texts may have been authored by someone other than the persons (or machine) who are re-shaping these materials. In remediation, this is a constant feature and sometimes a vexed one in the context of un-authorised use. Remix goes a step further by moving beyond content to the mixing of software applications. Manovich is emphatic about the key moment in which the software applications can be combined and hybridised in creative media works. The author function is transformed to an authoring one in which the orchestration of software replaces the more traditional content provision. As Manovich writes, “...The fact that this effect is simulated and removed from its original physical media means that a designer can manipulate it a variety of ways...” (Manovic 2006). The shift to the term “designer” from author also signals a different relationship to the creative process and raises questions about the role(s) now required in the making of creative media works.

Interactivity

Interactivity is germane to the lexicon of Internet media but is not a term that according to Manovich has been well understood in the general attempts to account for digital media experiences (Manovich 2008). The term has been debated for some time as to its appropriate level of definition for Internet relationships (Flew 2008). In application to screen media and specifically to Database Documentary, there are new possibilities of narrative afforded by non-linear forms of “interactivity” in relatively recently developed “authoring” programs such as *Korsakow*. (*Korsakow* projects are Database projects that build sequences through tagging – see a longer elaboration later in this paper.) Having recently experimented with *Korsakow*, Adrian Miles rejects the term, “interactive”, in favour of “...combinatory environments which provide templates or structures that provide for the connections being formed...” and opposes the authoring/publishing dyad

for these types of Database Documentary, where these architectures are instead, "...engines that allow content to be contributed and "mixed" in an ingoing basis." (Miles 2008: 225-226)

Again the implications for authorship are clear. Interactivity for a screen media artist is the emergent co-creating relationships that are facilitated by the Internet. In this definition of interactivity, the boundary between producer and consumer is blurred. Unlike interacting with *old media*, in digital media practices, there is an emphasis on producing *within* the interaction. Interactivity may be defined as (1) user to user interaction (social media, blogs), (2) para-social interaction, where online media generate new forms of user engagement with the content (social networks) and (3) user-to-system interactivity, or the ways in which users engage with the devices they are using (shared applications, file sharing). (McMillan 2002) These concepts can be deployed in relation to one another, for example, greater opportunities for participation may enhance the interactive quality of the producer-user relationships. When audiences can contribute to the *content* of Database Documentaries, the work is opened to new ideas and new forms of articulation... There are ways in which the content ceases to become an absolute narratively defined thing and rather a resource for a range of possible configurations in narrative or in a form that is reticulated along different lines than a linear narrative. In terms of *authorship*, the single source point for the creation of work no longer exists in this more distributed form of media practice.

Convergence and Transmedia Storytelling

The possibilities afforded by *convergence* within a web 2.0 environment open creative opportunities for the users and align them not only with other users but also with other producers of screen media. The key term that now represents the facilitation of digital media in online environments is *convergence* and the range of activities associated with these environments are grouped under the term of *convergence culture* (Jenkins 2006). Database Documentary depends on convergence, which combines the computer, the content derived from media and the networking facilities of the Internet. Convergence refers in the first instance to the interlinking of computing and IT; communication networks and media content that occurred with the development and popularisation of the Internet and the convergent products, services, and activities that emerged in the digital media space.

The second element of convergence is the evolution of devices (computers, mobile phones, television, etc.) towards multi-purpose conduits for a range of activities involving digital media. While the term *Web 2.0* designates the convergent forms and Internet media practices that have made *YouTube*, *My Space*, *Facebook* and other social networking sites popular, new possibilities of distributed media have sought to bridge the gap between mainstream media and new media.

Sites such as Ustream <http://www.ustream.tv/discovery/live/all>, Livestream <http://new.livestream.com/> and many others augur the launch of “Social TV” - term emerging to describe the potential convergence of Television and Social Media.

The model of authoring for Social TV varies in relation to the content provided and reflects the different models already a part of the Television landscape. Transmedia storytelling may reflect a need for collaborative models of authorship. Not unlike the cinema, historically, models of authorship have moved between single identified authors and collaborative teams that collectively realise the final work.

The materials often associated with ancillary materials to the core story tend to be corporately produced for social marketing or advertising campaigns. Alternative models are now emerging to harness the ancillary content (research, back stories) in storytelling models that create very different multi-levelled story experiences. See [01/22/transmedia-storytelling/](#)

Web 2.0's contribution has allowed for individuals to become online storytellers and to re-define how authorship is re-calibrated within the various narrative functions of Internet media.

Participation

Participation by the subjects of documentary in the work itself has always been a key feature by which a documentary was judged. This is no less the case for Database Documentary however, the rise of Web 2.0 is very much based on a concept of participation to effect the idea of *collective intelligence*. In media studies, an earlier engagement with the concept of participation centred on audience activity and involvement in media contexts. Community media (Downing 2009) and participatory communication (Servaes, Jacobson & White 1996) are two ways of expressing this interest. Also, studies in media audiences suggest that *active* and *resistant* audiences may define participation in the media audience context.

Authorship shifts in the context of the level and intensity of user involvement in the Internet. Variably termed, “sharing”, cyber-community, or simply interactivity, the Internet is primed for a significant re-calibration of engagement and practice. With greater participatory opportunities, the nature of authorship will change: Authors may proliferate as they have within the Blogosphere to create their own dynamic and presence. To summarise, remediation/remix, interactivity, convergence and participation are all buzzwords within the world of digital and web-based media. However, as concepts they require constant scrutiny as the practices themselves evolve to render these concepts obsolete. In the process, ideas of authorship will shift and change. In this context, the role of the author does not disappear but is re-calibrated to take up new and different activities and skills in the service of the production underway.

Authorship, Database Documentary and Vertov

New media objects may or may not employ these highly structured database models; however, from the point of view of user's experience, a large proportion of them are databases in a more basic sense. They appear as a collection of items on which the user can perform various operations: view, navigate, search. (Manovich 2001)

As suggested above, the work of Lev Manovich provides a relatively early (2001) attempt to theorise new media practices. In more recent work his analysis has struggled to maintain pace with the emergent spheres of web 2.0 and social media platforms. Manovich's analysis of Dziga Vertov's films is used to anchor a reading of digital media while his use of *database* is the organising concept for understanding web information design. It is both of these engagements that makes his work relevant to the understanding of Database Documentary.

It is perhaps a fortunate alignment when Lev Manovich selects Dziga Vertov's *Man with A Movie Camera* as a film, which in his terms, epitomises the database format.

In this fashion we can connect Database Documentary to *authorship* through one of the most significant *auteurs* of documentary film, Dziga Vertov. Manovich calls Vertov a *database filmmaker*. This description is uncannily close to the term, *Database Documentary*, now more common in circles where this practice has developed. It connects to the models of how we make artefacts on the Internet and the methods associated with older media such as Vertov's best-known film, *Man With a Movie Camera*. How, we might ask, can a figure of the early 20th century have a bearing on the theories and practices of screen media arts in the early years of the 21st century? Almost 100 years ago, Vertov's filmmaking practice was not long in train after the very outset of the cinema's existence as both an art form and an institution of mass entertainment. It took place within one of the most explosive periods and contexts for arts practices, that is, Soviet Russia in the period following the Russian revolution of 1918. The answer lies in the argument made by Manovich – that Vertov's film, *Man With A Movie Camera* epitomises the database structuring model that is best able to describe the relationship between digital media and information in web-based environments. If further evidence of his auteur status is required, it would be in the adaptation of Vertov's term, *Kino Pravda* or literally "film truth" better known in its French iteration as *Cinéma Vérité*. *Cinéma Vérité* represents a international documentary movement started during the period of the French New Wave and emulated in a number of films but most emphatically in Québec under the influence of Michel Brault. The partnership between Brault and the noted French documentary filmmaker, Jean Rouch led to the portability of camera and sound equipment. This in turn led to a hand-held camera movement that overwhelmingly defined the cinematographic style of films that came to be known under the name of *Cinéma Vérité*.

Dziga Vertov thus set in motion a significant tradition of documentary filmmaking but one that had to be interpreted and created in his name by those

artists who saw the distinctiveness of films such as *Man With a Movie Camera*. This film connects Russian modernism to contemporary works that use database and remix strategies.

...*Man with a Movie Camera* traverses its database in a particular order to construct an argument. Records drawn from a database and arranged in a particular order become a picture of modern life -- but simultaneously an argument about this life, an interpretation of what these images, which we encounter every day, every second, actually mean...

(Manovich 2001: 240)

This reading of *Man with a Movie Camera* aligns it directly with that part of the Internet that organises and makes accessible large and complex bodies of information. All those digital objects and coded materials on the Internet are forms of data. The *base* of the database is the space or place where the data can be stored. Storage of data can be web-based or it can be a designated digital repository. Manovich is keen to cite the database as the premier *logic* of the web and the digital materials that are processed as web-based objects and procedures. But this seems a world away from the modernist vision of Dziga Vertov. It demonstrates an explicit turn away from the idea of a single-identity author constructing a narrative even loosely based on a series of records. However as suggested by Marsha Kinder's project on Russian Formalism, it suggests that a deeper interrogation of the relationship of Russian formalism to contemporary remix digital culture is warranted.⁶

There are a number of features of Vertov's film, *Man with a Movie Camera*, that link forward to the Database Documentary. The film takes a database approach in that it catalogues many aspects of its subject materials. The film shows "collections" of images of many types including both social types and emergent technologies such as those found in transportation machines of the period. Most significantly the film presents a catalogue of new visual effects in the cinema, for example, slow motion, stop action and post production. The editing process is fore-grounded as a part of the film's construction as we are shown processes related to montage, split-screen and variations in editing rhythms.

Critical accounts of the *Man with a Movie Camera* have suggested that the film engages its audience at a number of levels of abstraction. It is self-referential in that it reflects upon its own processes of representation and invites the viewer to think about and engage with this reflection. At least three levels of abstraction can be identified:

- i) the story of a cameraman shooting a film
- ii) the account of an audience watching the film and
- iii) a day in the life which is the film itself.

Vertov's film is deemed to pre-empt a language of cinema in that it catalogues its content as social relations and communication techniques.

Because of the open-endedness of digital media devices, digital filmmaking is seen to empathise with Vertov's film in sharing a *resistance* to a finite language of visual representation. However in many instances (Youtube is one example), the web is a vehicle for mainstream media material that follows predictable structures.

If the analytical work can continue to grow in many directions, serviced by several readers/users, questions arise regarding the authorship, reading logic and overall experience of media materials. The experience of media will depart significantly from the past and current experience of film and television whose staple is the narrative or structured story by a single, identifiable author.

In this regard, *Man With a Movie Camera* does *not* share the Wikipedia model in its production as a film. *Man With a Movie Camera* is an experimental documentary and part of the avant-garde cinema movement in the 1920s that connected filmmakers and artists from such nations as the Soviet Union, France, Spain and Italy. This avant-garde uses cinema to experiment with narrative and other forms. Because this early period of cinema was, by definition *experimental*, it works for Manovich to frame digital media within this tradition because of the particular relationship that avant-garde artists had established with cinema. However, the cinema in its period of invention and driven by exploration is characterised by a cannon of auteurs (for example, Flaherty, Grierson) in the genre of the documentary.

With the Lumières short films from 1896 a pre-cursor of documentary form, the form of cinema that became *codified* as narrative cinema in the sense of Hollywood narrative form, was first developed and consolidated by DW Griffith (in the period from 1908 – 1915 (Metz 1974). Vertov's work emerges about 10 years later. By comparison, digital filmmaking has also had a relatively short history and is mediated by a range of related screen media practices from computer games to digital animation. It is interesting that the prolific emergence of film in the late 1890s was matched by a similar expansion of digital media in the late 1990s. In this regard the current developments in digital media have continued unabated and do appear to be consolidating around a technologically stable set of practices in the manner of the cinema in the early part of the 20th century.

Database Documentaries, Authorship and Narrative

One of the key questions posed by Manovich is that of the relationship between database and narrative. In an effort to explain this relationship, Manovich uses the example of the computer game. The user/player/gamer experiences the game as a story - and in many instances games have all the elements of a film - characters, plots, villains and settings. As a gamer you are drawn into the narrative to solve a problem or compete in some fashion to win. Unlike a film or book, the viewer/user gains entry points to affect the outcome of the story. However there are

similarities in the logics of the users in both games and films and increasingly these forms have moved closer towards one another.

In contrast to most games, most narratives do not require algorithm-like behaviour from their readers. However, narratives and games are similar in that the user, while proceeding through them, must uncover its underlying logic -- its algorithm. Just like a game player, a reader of a novel gradually reconstructs an algorithm (here I use it metaphorically) which the writer used to create the settings, the characters, and the events. (Manovich 2001: 199)

The gaming example also has implications for how one conceives of the authorship of a database. It is well known that gaming companies invite their users – “gamers” – to offer suggestions for how the game could be improved. The users potentially become “authors” of the experience by introducing complexity and by implication would modify the narrative elements of any gaming experience. Though on a different scale, the well-known practice of screening pre-released films to selected audiences is not dissimilar. These producer-led initiatives have frequently resulted in changes to films as substantial as the changing of sad endings to happier ones (*The Lovely Bones* 2009) and altering the length of shots and subsequently the length of the whole film (*Crocodile Dundee* 1986).⁷

Manovich’s point, however, is that Vertov’s film works as both a database *and* a narrative to produce his new form of cinema. The database is defined here as the compendium of cinematic techniques newly discovered in the era of cinema of the 1920’s. (Manovich 2001) The narrative in Vertov’s film is a *story* about the cinema. It is a story of about the presentation and demonstration of the emergence of new cinematic techniques. These techniques were able to show the audience a new way of seeing themselves and their social context. The author of this story is Vertov – he is literally “*the man with the movie camera*”.

As a narrative, Vertov’s film presents an argument - a way of speaking about and showing a strong interest in the meaning of its subject matter. The viewer of *Man With A Movie Camera* is engaged deeply in the story of a society at a critical point in the development of many technologies (with particular attention paid to new communication technologies) but also a society deeply divided as to the prospects of social change.

If we follow Manovich’s argument, conventional narrative and the visual culture that it supports should have become obsolete. Instead, conventional narrative persists, as does the dominant renaissance perspective of representational realism associated with mainstream media and visual cultures.

The key question posed by Manovich’s theory of the language of new media is:

...How can our new abilities to store vast amounts of data, to automatically classify, index, link and instantly retrieve data, lead to new forms of narrative?... (Manovich 2001: 208)

Put another way, how can a narrative take into account that its elements are organised into a database and use this knowledge to effect new forms of organisation?

Just as a game cannot know it is a game (Burnett: 2003), a narrative cannot know it is a narrative or what its own constituents are. There is a limit to this kind of objectification of what is, in fact a relationship between humans and the technologies that are used to develop the vehicles for narratives be they the more limited form developed for games or the more elaborated narratives that can be found in other forms (novels, films).

Manovich's locates the structuring principles in digital media forms to the narrative sequences as codified in the cinema of the 20th century – what was alluded to earlier as the D.W. Griffith contribution to the founding of Hollywood narrative cinema.

...When databases act as narratives, they are acting out the model of narrative cinema... (Manovich 2001: 232)

The Presence of the Author

This model of narrative cinema importantly does not preclude the inclination for digital media to orient its representations toward types of montage in which images are juxtaposed in radical ways or presented as multiple and superimposed in a single frame. It justifies the continuing co-habitation on the web of both narrative and database structures and allows for a Database Documentary to cohabit the documentary genre space with conventionally authored documentary.

For example, in one of the most significant documentary festivals held in the world, the International Documentary Festival Association (IDFA) in 2009 featured hundreds of documentaries with a relatively small showcase of Database Documentaries. Significantly, a catalogue of the festival's offerings was available on a touchscreen device for attendees to view both trailers and full-length versions of the films. With about a dozen Australian documentary films presented at IDFA in the 2009 competitions, there was sufficient indication of contemporary trends in authorship. For these films, the dominant mode of authorship was anchored by both a voice-over and the incorporation of the filmmaker as an actor in the film – that is implicated directly in the narrative as it evolved. The five films I viewed where this occurred were I. *Psychopath* (Walker), *The Snowman* (Levant), *The Mathilda Candidate* (Levy) *The Miscreants of Taliwood* (Gittoes) and *Contact* (Dean). *In A Good Man* (Uberoi) voice-over was used extensively but the presence of the filmmakers was not used as a plot device.

This trend towards self-insertion in pro-filmic space is logically an interest in displaying the key relationships in the film and as a means of creating intimacy within aspects of those relationships. They may also be seen as a means of irrevocably marking out an authorial presence and logically as a way of defining the source for the concepts and arguments as well as the knowledge interests of the film. The presence of the filmmaker in the pro-filmic reality of the work is not a new device in documentary however the prevalence and emphasis on this mode of

narrative may be a response to the perception that directors may be losing their independence to the whims of broadcasters who have been seeking to maximise audiences and doing so at the expense of originality and the challenges to audiences that independent filmmakers can bring to the screen.

The interest in Database Documentary may be a means to realise a different authorial presence than offered up by the “insertion-of –the-author” model alluded to above. Instead the author turns to “authoring” or as suggested below to re-working already shot and edited sequences in ways that opens at least to some extent the participation and intervention of the viewer/user.

Korsakow: Authoring/remixing/storytelling/

Adrian Miles (Miles 2008: 223) uses the terms “hard” and “soft” to characterise the differences when video moves from a fixed and contained platform (as in a broadcast documentary) to an interactive platform using an open or flexible architecture. His recent work on video editing systems calibrated for interactive distribution and consumption is decidedly biased towards the “presentation of things...representational and indexical”. In this regard it is worthy to examine the way Miles contextualises these practices and to examine one form of video editing and authoring program in detail, called the *Korsakow* system.

Miles begins a conversation about video editing with the definition of the minimal unit of a videographic narrative structure. Here he follows closely on Christian Metz’s earlier work in which the lowest indivisible unit is the shot (Metz 1974). In Metz’s film semiotic, the lowest indivisible unit is in fact a *sequence* in that as a narrative unit it cannot be restricted or defined in terms of either a single frame (when speaking of celluloid) or an single image but rather as a set of frames or images because it is through a juxtaposition of shots that sequences are built. Sequences allow a narrative structure to be built towards the telling of a story and in the Hollywood cinema (which Metz was mostly interested in) these tended towards conventionally structured stories within a 3-act structured narrative arc using linear editing approaches.

Miles re-asserts Metz’s point on the shot/sequence as the minimal unit as a means of explaining the remixing video editing practices such as Korsakow. Returning to the hard/soft distinction, the limit that for Miles defines a “hard” video is when publication/export out of a video-editing program removes any further manipulation of the shots/sequences. “Soft” video is able to retain the potential of manipulating/editing shots/sequences *after* publication. And it is this quality that is rendered into a user-generated non-linear program by the authoring software known as *Korsakow*.

The Korsakow System is defined on its website as,

... an easy-to-use computer program for the creation of database films. It was invented by Florian Thalhoffer, a Berlin-based media artist. Korsakow Films are films

with a twist: They are interactive – the viewer has influence on the K-Film. They are rule-based – the author decides on the rules by which the scenes relate to each other, but s/he does not create fixed paths. K-Films are generative – the order of the scenes is calculated while viewing... (see <http://korsakow.org/>)

In Miles' Korsakow film, *Fragments for a Vog* (<http://vogmae.net.au/fragments/>), a number of small screens set below a central screen provide a set of choices for the viewer for the continued non-linear presentation of shot/segments. Under the central screen, a poetic or somewhat elliptical phrase captions the sequence. This recalls an earlier work titled, *Life After Wartime* by Kate Richards and Ross Gibson (see www.lifeafterwartime.com) The selection of one of the smaller screens in turn generates a new central screen and a set of new smaller screens beneath it. The content in Miles' film is a selection of scenes that suggest "slices of life" including outdoor scenes, family and friends. In this sense it does hark back to the earliest Lumière's slices of life filmed as experiments in some of the earliest examples of cinema alluded to above.

Miles refers to the Korsakow system as "Director-based" and one that uses individually tagged already published (and digitised) clips or sequences. The author effectively develops a library of tagged clips – some sequences can have multiple tags allowing for complex sequencing when selected by users. The searches by users effect a search logic similar to the Boolean logic found in many web-based browsers. Clips can have tags within their timelines allowing for matches to be made within the clips according to the authored rules.

Miles summarises the stages through which a Korsakow Database Documentary proceeds paraphrased as follows:

1. An authoring process of tagging already digitised clips and assembling these into a clip library.
2. Clips are arranged and marked for placement on the web page with a central screen bounded by a number of thumbnail screens. The selection and juxtaposition of sequences allows for both sequences and screens to be aligned to one another.
3. In an unusual implication for authorship, not only is the sequencing subject to user-based selections but with particular programming constraints, the sequence selection can be determined *outside the agency of both the author and the user*.

Miles summarises the implications of this kind of agency thus:

...This poses significant and fascinating problems in turn for narrative practice in such softvideo environments as we move from being video makers creating specific and single video works towards being designers of combinatorial engines and the possible narrative, and non-narrative, discourses they enable... (2008: 226)

This is an important manner of distinguishing *authors* from *authoring* and the formulation of a discourse appropriate to developing a new critical language for a new media form.

Conclusion

If there is a conclusive direction for re-thinking the future of authorship in documentary via Database Documentary, it may be the case, that as Miles concludes, it is a move from content creation in the sense of how documentary filmmaking has been a film practice based on authorship and publishing in the institutions of film and television to “design and systems development...towards the architecture of poetic and possibly autopoietic systems...” (Miles 2008: 229).

There is a sense that Miles is attempting to create a theoretical language appropriate to what he sees as an important departure in the construction of media artifacts. His insistence on a more subtle attribution than the terms “interactive” and “authoring” imply for Database Documentary suggests this commitment. It may be that these more subtle distinctions can be used to encourage a re-think of basic operations in the field of editing and media formations. There is, however, a sense that the understanding of post-published editing programs like Korsakow also relies on older semiotic theory (Metz) and aesthetics (Montage/Russian Formalism). This reliance seems not to be acknowledged in Miles’ push towards this new horizon of media architectures at least not in the sense articulated by Manovich. The implications for contemporary understanding and teaching of documentary film practice are serious because both the language of theory and the intellectual antecedents for practice are indispensable for a truly *radical* approach – if we understand the definition of *radical* as working in terms of the *roots* of concepts and ideas. The Database Documentary is re-defining the fundamental tenets of documentary practice and authorship. In the process it is opening new avenues for re-thinking the professional models of media practice. In this regard, the conversation should still be, from the documentary producers vantage point, one that respects the role of the author, the sources of the documentary genre – in the past and present – and a view that remains attentive to how it is changing in the face of new media contexts and practices.

Dr Hart Cohen is Associate Professor in Media Arts and Director of Research and Postgraduate Studies in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. He has led two Australian Research Council Projects that resulted in the broadcast of two films, ‘Mr. Strehlow’s Films’ (SBSI 2001) and ‘Cantata Journey’ (ABC TV 2006) and produced a database documentary related to TGH Strehlow’s memoir, ‘Journey to Horseshoe Bend’. He leads a current ARC project on Databases and Discoverability in relation to the Strehlow Collection. He is a member of the Institute for Culture and Society, UWS and editor of Global Media Journal/Australian Edition <http://www.commarts.uws.edu.au/gmjau/>. E-mail: h.cohen@uws.edu.au

Notes

- ¹ This critical tradition is associated with Francois Truffaut, Jean Luc Godard and others of the Cahiers du Cinema group. Later Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael, American critics continued the debate surrounding auteurism in the cinema.
- ² There were a number of other similar books on documentary History that appeared around this time, e.g., Alan Lovell and Jim Hillier, *Studies in Documentary*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972); Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1975)
- ³ http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display_synopsis.php?j_id=18
- ⁴ For Kinder, the issues cannot be resolved only by partisan arguments that both groups tend to use. She suggests that there are important lessons to be learned by taking a glance backwards to earlier eras of media innovation when similar claims by lay and professionals alike were made.
- ⁵ In this regard, the emergence of structured theories about digital technologies has expanded greatly in the past decade since the publication of Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* in 2001. Since that time, Manovich has extended his views to engage with and underscore his theories of so-called new media (see *Remixability* (2005) and *Software Takes Command* (2008)). *Software Takes Command* lifts its title from the classic text by Siegfried Giedion titled, *Mechanisation Takes Command* – a book that was a significant influence on the thought of Marshall McLuhan (Theall 76). In linking his work on software to Giedion and McLuhan, Manovich's intellectual project continues his earlier work on developing a historical view of the emergence of new media – albeit within a personalised and anecdotal approach to an as-yet to be defined field with no discernable methodology.
- ⁶ One of Marsha Kinder's Database Documentary projects was termed *Russian Formalism*. In a direct link to Manovich's use of Vertov, this specific work (which features Manovich in one of its segments of interactive lectures), the influence of Russian modernism on remix culture comes full circle. See Kinder, Marscha, "The Conceptual Power of Online Video: Five Easy Pieces", in *Video Vortex Reader Responses to Youtube*, Lovink and Niederer, Eds., 2008, 61.
- ⁷ *Crocodile Dundee* was re-edited for American audiences on the basis that long takes were not as pleasing as short ones.

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