LOST IN TRANSLATION

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Orientalism, Cinema, and the Enigmatic Signifier

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FOR MY FATHER, JAN HWA KING

CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Sid Grauman's Chinese Theater opened on May 18, 1927, two years after the actress Anna May Wong drove its inaugural rivet at the beginning of construction.[1] Designed by the architect Raymond Kennedy for the firm of Meyer and Holler, the colossal theater boasted seating for over twenty-four hundred. The forecourt, destined to become a pantheon of Hollywood celebrity, featured a jungle of tropical trees shading its temple of concrete hand and foot prints. The center lobby was adorned with Chinese draperies, and red lacquer pillars stood in its four corners. A mural by Keye Luke featured regal Chinese figures posed amid an intricate network of bridges, pagodas, and foliage.[2] The interior of the theater, which was always delicately perfumed, was yet more opulent. Guests stepped onto a plush jade-green carpet and sat in red leatherette chairs decorated with black scrolls. There were pagoda-shaped balconies with imperial yellow tile roofs, and from the ceiling hung a chandelier lined in silk and encircled with crystal pendants, which were illuminated with multicolored lights. The fire curtain was a bright peacock blue, decorated with sumptuous gold and silver designs of birds and trees. The usherettes were costumed in copies of Chinese theatrical gowns, embroidered in gold and covered with dozens of miniature mirrors. The lobby of Grauman's theater contained several automata—wax mannequins of Chinese people that moved mechanically to give the appearance of smoking opium or fanning. A souvenir pamphlet describing the theater states that "these were indeed so realistic that people tried to talk to them."[3]

Shortly after the opening of Grauman's Chinese Theater, the reporter Ralph Flint panned its design by calling it "an elaborate fantasia of pseudo oriental gingerbread ornament" and a "cluttered mass of detail."[4] He criticized its aesthetic of surfaces by suggesting that "trick features" trumped actual substance.[5] His critique is telling, for it reveals a fascinated anxiety about the Western spectator's capacity to be tricked both by cinema and by things "oriental." The pleasures and dangers of tropical scenery, wax automata, and beckoning silk-clad usherettes derive in part from the viewer's capacity to be fooled by shimmering icons. From forecourt to red velvet chair, the Chinese Theater immerses its guests in a dazzling and fictitious Orient. At times, this Orient openly declares its status as illusion. The exterior of the theater has a strangely two-dimensional look, as if it were the facade of a set. The illuminated crystals and reflecting surfaces that characterize the theater's décor emphasize the pleasure of cinema as ephemeral, flickering light. The automata in turn evoke an idea of cinema as a compelling replica of three-dimensional reality. Like its sister theater the Egyptian, the Chinese Theater offers up a false, even kitsch, replica of the Orient.[6] Moreover, though, it actually associates East Asia with the duplicity of the cinema. To enter the space of Grauman's Chinese Theater is to enter into a hall of mirrors where orientalist décor becomes intertwined with, and to some extent inseparable from, the illusionistic lure of cinema itself.

As is the case with many of the films I discuss in this book, Grauman's Chinese Theater imagines East Asia as the site of an enigmatic indecipherability. The Orient appears as a labyrinthine world teeming with inscrutable objects, concealing secrets that are irretrievably lost in translation. The existing scholarship on orientalism and narrative film often bypasses mise-en-scène in favor of an analysis of racially stereotyped characters. The analysis of mise-en-scène, though, has the potential to reveal some of the most haunting projections that have structured Western fantasies about East Asia. Stereotyped figures are to some extent inseparable from the visual worlds that they inhabit, and these milieus and the objects within them deserve scrutiny in their own right. In this book I approach the task of interpreting these imaginary foreign landscapes through the notion of "the enigmatic signifier," a concept elaborated by the psychoanalytic thinker Jean Laplanche.[7] The theory of the enigmatic signifier provides a key twist upon classic psychoanalytic accounts of subject formation: it suggests

that our interior lives are set in motion by an encounter with the unknown and unintelligible. This theory can be of special use for thinking about differences of race, language, geography, and other forms of alterity.

Depictions of East Asia and its diasporas in Hollywood cinema have remained surprisingly consistent across the twentieth century. Formally, they tend to deploy a predictable set of visual tropes, including crowds of anonymous figures who move chaotically, often without regard for the rules of continuity; foreshortened, disorienting spaces that collapse foreground and background; and mise-en-scènes cluttered with hanging objects, neon signs, and layers of screens and windows that make reflections difficult to discern from their objects. We see a version of this aesthetic at work in many films that I discuss in this book, from D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* (1919) to Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974), and from Josef von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture* (1942) to Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003). The Chinatowns, Tokyos, and Shanghais depicted in these films are dumping grounds for dead letters, overdetermined icons, and mutterings that belong to no dialect in particular. With varying degrees of self-consciousness, these films depict East Asia and its diasporas as enclaves littered with signifiers that blink in the streets with neither clear sender nor obvious recipient. These filmic worlds often contain curious objects or details of ornament that seem to lie outside of rational systems of knowledge and communication. This book is largely about these visual objects—Asian figurines, an origami unicorn, a jacket by a Japanese designer—and how they come to stand in for greater unknowns. It is also about riddles: unsolved detective stories, ethnic jokes, and voices speaking in tongues. Finally, it is about metaphors—Chinese boxes, being shanghaied, Chinese walls. These objects, riddles, and metaphors share a unique feature: they are all enigmatic signifiers, and they all implicitly draw an association between Asian things and things that defy traditionally Western modes of rational cognition.

Enigmatic signifiers are messages received in early infancy that the fledgling human subject is simply unable to comprehend. These messages, which can be verbal, visual, tactile, or even olfactory, constitute the prototype for all future experiences of bewilderment. While the infant may understand that they are addressed to her, and that they demand a response of some kind, their content is wholly unintelligible. To make matters worse, these communications are permeated

with meanings of which even their senders are unaware; they are unconscious on the part of both parties. They also lack originals: according to Laplanche, every enigmatic signifier is a copy of an endless series of copies that has been passed down through the generations as in a game of telephone. For Laplanche, these signs do not disappear with mature understanding but rather remain at the heart of human interaction. The originary scenario of the enigmatic signifier is retriggered throughout the subject's life whenever he or she is sent a mixed message, hailed by an ambiguous address, or confronted with a scenario that seems to invite and yet resist decoding. The entrenched dichotomy between East and West, often assumed to be monolithic and completely diametrically opposed, provides fertile ground for these paranoid sorts of encounters and thus a uniquely rich terrain for their analysis.

Laplanche helps to reveal how, thanks to the enigmatic signifier, communication with others can go terribly wrong, to the point where whole populations of the globe appear to be sealed off by a thick wall of unintelligibility. For Lacan, there was no sexual relation; for Laplanche, it may seem at times as though there is no relationality at all. Upon closer look, though, his theory provides a remarkable doorway from the self to the external world, an opening that often appears to be sealed shut in psychoanalytic accounts of subjectivity. This doorway can lead to relations with other human beings that are not fully structured by projection, and it can show the way to possibilities for more reciprocal, if not transparent, forms of cross-cultural exchange.[8] For Laplanche, the heart of darkness that structures human subjectivity is neither a core instinct of biology nor a core wickedness of the soul. It is the enigmatic signifier, which arises not from the body, the soul, or even from the individual psyche, but rather from the experience of actual contact with concrete other human beings, and the signifying dances into which we thereby enter.

In chapter 1, I discuss in detail the possibilities that Laplanche offers for a theory of alterity and how we cope with it. Before doing so, though, it is necessary to turn to some of the texts on racial representation that form the preconditions for my work here, most notably Edward Said's *Orientalism*. Said's book concerns Western Europe's relation to the Arab-Islamic world rather than that of the United States to East Asia, and it addresses historical and scholarly discourse rather

than popular and aesthetic forms. Yet few would dispute that it has been immeasurably influential for thinking about these latter areas and objects of inquiry in its capacity as ur-text in postcolonial studies, critical race studies, and related fields.[9] Homi Bhabha and Rey Chow have suggested that in spite of its far-reaching influence, *Orientalism* has left critics at an impasse of sorts. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha suggests that Said fails to describe fully the semiotic and representational mechanics of orientalism and does not fully explore the implications of his Foucaultian terms. "Having introduced the concept of 'discourse,'" Bhabha writes, Said "does not face up to problems it creates for an instrumentalist notion of power/knowledge that he seems to require."[10] Chow likewise suggests that the groundwork Said lays in *Orientalism* demands further elaboration in the present. In *Ethics after Idealism*, she writes that Said's work effectively raises the issue of the representation of "subordinated otherness," but without following up with "any practicable notion of how such representation could go beyond the parameters of Orientalism."[11]

There are ways of reading Said's foundational text that would mine it for theoretical solutions to the dilemmas that Bhabha and Chow raise, either by resuscitating overlooked passages or by reading between the lines of his prose. Bhabha does so in *The Location of Culture*, where he quotes the following passage from *Orientalism:* "The Orient at large . . . vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty."[12] Bhabha then reworks Said's language for a psychoanalytically informed theory of the stereotype that he develops in this text, which he claims is likewise characterized by an ambivalent vacillation between delight and fear, and between the familiar and the unknown. He ultimately defines the stereotype as an instantiation of divided belief, similar to the structure of anxiety and pleasure marked by disavowal that characterizes fetishism in Freud's account and which Metz adapts for his theory of cinema spectatorship. Chow likewise takes Said's work as an occasion to argue for studies of cross-cultural representation and exchange that move beyond straightforward anti-orientalist critiques and toward an analysis of the fantasy structures that motivate these representations. She suggests that a key precondition for such work is that we must problematize "the presumption of stable identities" rather than simply aim for more accurate representations of Asian identities already presumed stable.[13] She subsequently proposes figures of hybridity and miscege-

nation as possible objects for such inquiry. Chow suggests that it is not enough to expose the violence of Western orientalist modes of representation, or even to propose indigenous, vernacular, or other local forms of representation as their counterpoint, although she states that such work is necessary as well. She concludes that the binary opposition between East and West must itself be rethought, and the question of how self and other imagine, relate to, and represent one another must be posed anew.

There is a passage from *Orientalism* that may serve an analogous function for my work in this volume. Toward the beginning of his book, Said makes clear that orientalism is rooted in an attempt to carve out an enigma-free space: an imaginary site of transparent representation from which whatever has been marked as other and unknown can be fully cordoned off. "Everyone who writes about the Orient," Said remarks, "must locate himself vis-à-vis the Orient." This "location," however, is not a geographical one; it is psychical and textual and has largely to do with modes of address. It includes, says Said, "the kind of narrative voice [the author] adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kinds of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text." All of these elements, Said concludes, suggest a way of "addressing the reader" and "containing the Orient."[14] This passage implies that modes of address adopted by the orientalist writer, and the tropological movements by which the text's images and motifs circulate, are just as significant and worthy of scrutiny as the content of the message. As such Said seems to offer a complex theory of discourse, and one that dovetails nicely with Laplanche's notion of enigmatic signification in its invocation of "address" as a key feature of the semiotic. As Laplanche puts it, every sign is not only a signifier "of" something, but also "to" and "from" someone.[15]

The field of film studies has been an obvious beneficiary of Said's legacy. Scholars from Donald Bogle to Linda Williams have shown how Hollywood has projected blackness as the sign of an ineluctable otherness.[16] Cinematic orientalism likewise has a long and robust history about which many scholars have written.[17] Most of this literature is concerned with stereotypic depictions of ethnic characters, and the way that these representations operate to reify difference and shore up hegemonic national values within a given plot structure or film genre. Several theories of Asian stereotypes have laid the groundwork for my work in this book, and although I ultimately move away from this

concept it is nevertheless important to mention them. In *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* Robert G. Lee analyzes stereotyped depictions of Asians as they arise in conjunction with historical and political conditions. Lee lists six representations of Asian Americans—the pollutant, the coolie worker, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook—and notes that each emerges at a specific historical moment. The image of the subservient coolie appears in the late nineteenth century with the arrival of immigrant labor from China as a generalization about Chinese character that in fact stems from socioeconomic conditions. Likewise, the model minority stereotype arrives in the 1950s as United States immigration practices change to grant priority access from East Asia to the technically skilled, the educated, and the university bound (and to exclude others).

Gina Marchetti has shown that films such as Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915) reflect a yellow peril–style anxiety through their eroticization of the East and invocation of the threat of miscegenation. Marchetti describes how this concept taps into primal fears and anxieties traceable to a history of invasion: "Rooted in medieval fears of Genghis Khan and Mongolian invasions of Europe, the yellow peril combines the racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East."[18] Later, with the end of slavery and the influx of Chinese immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth century, the yellow peril, Marchetti notes, was reconceived as "a flood of cheap labor threatening to diminish the earning power of white European immigrants."[19] Marchetti here shows how the stereotype may be overdetermined, that is, how diverse historical events, economic developments, and sociopolitical conditions may coalesce and condense into a single image. The medieval fear of an infiltration by Asian hoards is revived not only in the late nineteenth century but also at the start of the twenty-first in relation to Chinese and Japanese economic expansion, exportation of goods, and financial investment in American cities, corporations, and real estate.

In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Lisa Lowe provides another gloss on the notion of stereotype. Lowe critiques and interprets the persistence of some of the most tired Asian American stereotypes, which tend to take the form of the emasculation, feminization, and eroticization of the Asian body. "The figure of the Asian immigrant has served as a 'screen,'" she writes, "a phantasmatic site, on

which the nation projects a series of condensed, complicated anxieties regarding external and internal threats to the mutable coherence of the national body."[20] These anxious projections include "the invading multitude, the lascivious seductress, the servile yet treacherous domestic, the automaton whose inhuman efficiency will supersede American ingenuity." Lowe suggests that the "unfixed liminality" of the Asian American gives rise to an "endless fixing and repeating" of these stereotypes.[21] The result is a self-perpetuating cycle: stereotypical images are constantly redefined in order to serve their function, which is to assist in constituting a national body through negation. In turn, what makes a particular image suitable for stereotypicality is the degree to which it lends itself to this constant refashioning, that is, how generative it can be as a theme for endless variations. Lisa Nakamura has updated this concept for the digital age by proposing the term "cybertype" to describe "the images of race that arise when the fears, anxieties, and desires of privileged western users . . . are scripted into a textual/graphical environment that is in constant flux and revision."[22]

The "endless fixing and repeating" to which Lowe calls attention, and the "constant flux and revision" of which Nakamura speaks, can be described in psychoanalytic terms through the Laplanchean concept of the enigma. The notion of invasion correlates to Laplanche's notion of a traumatic implantation of the other, or what Laplanche calls a "primal seduction" whereby the infant becomes other to herself through the incursion of parental desire. The eroticization of the East and the figure of the Asian seductress also recall Laplanche's notion of seduction, with the dragon ladies such as those seen in films like *The Letter* and *The Shanghai Gesture* serving as the agents of this luring astray. The stereotype of the treacherous domestic, who appears in *The Letter*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, and *Chinatown*, can be read in terms of an enigmatic duplicity. The secrets that these servants withhold from these films' Western, male protagonists are fodder for blackmail or fraud and also metaphors for larger epistemological and psychical unknowns. Finally, the figure of the automaton suggests a subject who is not self-possessed but rather governed by a foreign code. The replicants in *Blade Runner*, automaton-like artificial life-forms conscripted into slave labor, are orientalized in their origins and alliances and inhabit a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles that has been taken over by Asian foreign interests. Each of these stereotypes can in turn be traced to appropriate historical contexts. The figure of the Asian seductress

gains prominence in the film noir of the World War II era, as it corresponds with rising fears of miscegenation among American soldiers dispatched to the Pacific theater. The science fiction image of the Asian automaton gains added currency in the 1980s with the rise of Japanese technological advancement and manufacturing capabilities.

Studies of the pernicious ways in which stereotypes misinform, abstract, and departicularize their subjects are necessary and far from exhausted, and it is illuminating to link the emergence of these images to their attendant historical circumstances, as well as to examine the complicated psychical processes through which stereotypes are generated and adhere to their targets. Bhabha provides one way of so doing with his account of the stereotype as a fetishistic image that crystallizes the Western subject's ambivalent aggression and curiosity in the face of racial difference. Karen Shimakawa likewise turns to psychoanalytic theory in *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*, where she argues that stereotypes of Asian Americanness are driven by a process of abjection in the attempt to constitute an American national body. Following Bhabha, she writes that "the coincident or simultaneous split in the case of Asian American stereotypes can be understood as a product of abjection" and that "the 'contradictions' [within and among such stereotypes] may be understood as . . . the continually collapsing project of abjection as a fundamental element of national identity formation."[23] The stereotype's constant shifting and revision to accommodate new historico-political developments resembles the psychical process by which a fantasy image must be continually "reality checked" as new perceptions crop up in the external world.

The concept of stereotype in filmic representation, however, also leads to a focus on characters and human actors, and to a notion of abstractions offered in place of individuals, sketches in place of psychologically full portraits, and lies in place of truths. Such an approach risks falling into the trap of suggesting that there is another, more authentic, indigenous mode of representation that would provide unmediated access to the group or place in question. It implicitly suggests that local representations exhibit a more simplistic, literal correspondence to factual reality—that is, that they are not also semiotically complex and riven through with ideological and psychical conflicts, complex motivations, and circuitous modes of address. This mode of inquiry also risks taking fictive locations for real ones, thereby suggesting that the antidote to a false Orient is an authentic Orient—rather

than questioning any generalized notion of the Orient as such. Finally, the idea of indigenous representations of an ethnic group as more accurate than their imported counterparts risks assuming that a composite representation of a race, ethnicity, or nationality is possible or desirable in the first place.

One solution to this problem is offered by a Laplanchean theory of the stereotype. Such a theory would define the stereotype as a representation not of an external other but rather of an internal alterity. This way of conceptualizing the stereotype, however, complicates the project of undoing it. If the stereotype is a translation of the enigmatic signifier, its referent is not an actual people or place in the world but rather an interior kernel of psychical alterity—an aggregate of various enigmatic signifiers that one has received over the course of one's life. Stereotypes, according to this model, would be products not just of bad-faith efforts to represent an other but also of an anxiety about an inextricable component of the self. Correcting the stereotype thus cannot be simply a matter of replacing a false representation with a more accurate one, nor even a general image with an individuated, particular one. However, neither can it be to dissolve the internal alterity that is the source of these images, for to do so would be simultaneously to obliterate the self—along with the possibility of any relationship, aggressive or otherwise, to alterity and to other people. According to this model, to attempt to undo stereotypical images by offering up ones that better correspond to factual reality is to fight a losing battle, for such images are part of a larger structure of paranoid defense that cannot be dismantled through simple substitution.

Although I cannot hope to resolve this problem, I attempt to respond to the dilemma it raises in several ways. First, rather than take Asian characters or people as my object of inquiry, I explore Asian racial representation in cinema primarily through the analysis of style, objects, and mise-en-scène. Second, I look for forms of representation that avoid the paranoid dynamics of enigmatic signification and that deconstruct the long-standing binary opposition between monolithic notions of East and West. At the beginning of *Empire of Signs*, Roland Barthes's volume of fragments inspired by a trip to Japan, the author warns his readers that the country he is going to write about is not the real Japan but rather a fictive nation. Likewise, this volume is not a book about East Asia as such; indeed, for the reasons stated above it expressly declines to turn to East Asian cinema as a corrective to orien-

talism. Neither does this book aspire to be an encyclopedic treatment of Western representations of East Asia, or even a full account of them from a particular place and era. The reader will no doubt notice that the texts I discuss range widely from silent-era Hollywood to the European New Wave and beyond. My hope is that any loss of contextual specificity entailed in this approach is offset by the theoretical and conceptual insights to be had, insights that I would suggest are most clearly illuminated through a comparative approach rooted in the analysis of aesthetic forms. The texts that I discuss in this book are in dialogue with one another around questions of internal alterity and cross-cultural representation. Some of them do not belong clearly to any single genre, form, or national cinema, and they address questions of otherness through their own hybridity. Other seemingly more homogenous texts reveal internal alterities upon closer scrutiny. To me, their eclecticism is an asset to this study, and my juxtapositions are intended to preserve and highlight these texts' enactments of the paradoxical dynamic between self and other. Through such an approach, one may come to understand the trappings of the imaginary East not simply as what must be excluded from a Western psyche in order to ensure its coherence but rather as a foreignness that is irrevocably inscribed within it.

Chapter 1 of this book, "The Enigmatic Signifier," lays theoretical groundwork through the writings of Jean Laplanche. As I mention above, psychoanalytic theory has been faulted for its failure to address questions of race and other sociocultural aspects of identity and for its positing of a transcendent or universal subject. In some ways, these critiques reflect the fact that the psychoanalytic subject seems to be irremediably solipsistic and self-enclosed. Even at its most intersubjective, psychoanalytic theory is often pessimistic about the possibility of genuine, open exchange between self and other. The subject theorized in Freud, Lacan, and Klein—at least as these thinkers have often been understood—sees the external world primarily as a threat to be neutralized through aggressive strategies of projection and containment. Laplanche, whose thinking is influenced by phenomenology, helps to rectify these misunderstandings by making clear that the human other is present to the infant subject from the very beginning, not merely as a screen for the projection of fantasy or as an abstract representative of the social realm and its structures but rather as a concrete, interacting

individual. More accurately, the other actually precedes the self; there is therefore no need to "restore" this other to the subject.

Although Laplanche mentions the relevance of his work to the problem of social difference only in a footnote, his theory has the potential to shift the terms of this problem in significant ways. When rethought in terms borrowed from Laplanche, racism, ethnocentrism, and similar forms of projection designed to maintain a separation between self and other are not merely unfortunate side effects in the maintenance of Western subjectivity that can be dispelled through conscious critique. Rather, for better or worse, such projections have their source in a foundational aspect of that subjectivity that can be altered but never entirely undone. I illustrate these ideas through a reading of the artist Steve McQueen's *Once upon a Time* (2002), a work of contemporary art that engages the problems of the enigmatic signifier through the metaphor of a "message in a bottle" to a hypothetical alien other in outer space. This work of art is only tangentially related to the rest of the texts in this study, in that it only obliquely references East Asia. However, its metaphor of "alienness" provides an illuminating example of enigmatic signification that dovetails nicely with Laplanche's own references to extraterrestrial communication and the human desire to project an image to an unknown other. With its image of the Great Wall of China, a structure that has served as a metaphor for both a fortification against difference and for a unified humanity, *Once upon a Time* forms a point of connection to some of the other visual objects and metaphors that I discuss in this book.

Chapter 1 also addresses the notion of Asian writing as closer to the pictorial and further away from verbal language proper, an idea that the linguist John DeFrancis has called "the ideographic myth."[24] Miriam Bratu Hansen has in turn suggested that the figure of the "hieroglyph" or "arabesque" makes appearances at important points in the writings of members of the Frankfurt school, and that for thinkers such as Siegfried Kracauer this figure is explicitly associated with cinema.[25] In *Film Form* Sergei Eisenstein also analogizes his theory of montage to what he calls the "hieroglyphic" aspects of the Japanese language. Initially, Eisenstein idealizes the alterity of Eastern symbolic systems for their revolutionary potential. However, in the course of his efforts to catalogue the East's signifying differences from the West, he ends up deconstructing this binary opposition in productive and exemplary ways that are carried through by some of the filmmakers I

discuss in subsequent chapters. This section also introduces semiotic concepts or ways of describing modes of representation—iconic versus symbolic, pictorial versus abstract—which I use throughout the readings of visual texts in the remainder of the book. Returning to these concepts, I suggest, can help to realign a conversation about the representation of otherness, with a conversation about the limits of representation.

In chapter 2, "The Shanghai Gesture," I show how the Orient appears as enigma in the mise-en-scène of classical Hollywood narrative films. Through my opening reading of D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms* I identify and define a trope that I call "the Shanghai gesture," which I explore in two classic examples, Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946). These films, like other examples of noir from this period, feature small orientalist objects—silk curtains, Chinese coins, bowls of incense—that at first glance seem insignificant or meant only to evoke a vague sense of dark exoticism. Through a sleight of hand, however, these Eastern objects and touches of décor become symbols of the irresolvably enigmatic and unintelligible—or specifically what falls outside the rational comprehension of the Western private detective. Orientalist elements of mise-en-scène come to bear the burden of explanation for unresolved aspects of the plot; they are visually offered up as the explanation for the inexplicable. Joseph von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture*, the film from which I take my term, not only contains these kinds of objects but also involves a "Shanghai gesture" in the history of its production. The massive efforts that the Hays office made to censor the film during its journey from page to screen seem to replicate that trope in that the film's "orientalness" came to be associated with its perceived moral ambiguity. In Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai*, accented speech also undergoes a Shanghai gesture. Like the orientalist furniture in Geiger's house in *The Big Sleep*, Elsa's Cantonese utterances function as a marker of awryness and guilt. Accented speech, like Chinese décor, comes to signal the epistemological limit point of Western rationality that is often embodied in film noir protagonists.

The theme of indeterminate Eastern objects and speech also surfaces in two films of the Hollywood Renaissance era and its immediate aftermath, Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). I turn to these films in chapter 3, "The Chinatown Syndrome." Each of these films explores questions of oriental-

ism, signification, and the indeterminate through the generic framework provided by the conventions of the neo-noir film. Both are set in fantasy versions of Los Angeles, *Chinatown* in the noir past of the 1940s and *Blade Runner* in an imaginary future in 2019. In my reading of *Chinatown* I argue that it satirizes the Shanghai gestures of its classical noir predecessors. The film's title is itself an enigmatic signifier that critics have struggled to interpret. In this film, detective Jake (Jack Nicholson) is frequently confronted with coded and accented speech that he repeats back without understanding: a gardener's complaint that the water is "bad for glass," for example, or an ethnic joke told by a barber. *Chinatown* makes heavy use of motifs of doubling and repetition, many of which might be read psychoanalytically in terms of the repetition compulsion and a narrative of traumatic not-knowing. In my analysis I claim that these motifs are finally less about the Western detective's personal trauma than they are about the film's own relation to specters of internal ethnic difference and its relationship to their history of fictional representation in Hollywood film.

My reading of *Blade Runner* likewise centers on interpretations of ambiguous Eastern signs and objects in the film's ornate, culturally eclectic mise-en-scène, which Giuliana Bruno has described as exemplary of postmodernity. This mode of analysis can be extended to a broader examination of the film's understanding of multiculturalism and internal otherness. I agree with several scholars who have suggested that the film's take on racial alterity is to be found not only in its depiction of ethnic characters but also in the replicants, who represent this world's primary "other." *Blade Runner* associates the otherness of the replicants with simulation and virtuality and reveals the ways in which these qualities are also occasionally associated with the East. For example, the story of the replicants resonates with discourses of the assimilating "model minority" Asian immigrant, who is replicant-like in her seemingly limitless capacity to mimic and even outperform her Western counterparts. The anxieties about technological reproduction invoked in this film might be tied to the movement of manufacturing overseas and, obliquely, to fears about the threat of Asian piracy. Like the orientalist "curios" I discuss in chapter 2, counterfeit goods are overdetermined, and the response to them often appears to be racially inflected. *Blade Runner*, I suggest, implicitly reflects upon the association of the Orient with fake copies and upon the notion of the East as a simulacral alterity that lies at the heart of the West.

Chapter 4, "The Great Wall," looks to four films from the 1970s and 1980s from outside of Hollywood: Michelangelo Antonioni's epic China documentary *Chung Kuo: Cina* (1972), Leslie Thornton's experimental *Adynata* (1983), Wim Wenders's essay film *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (1989), and Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989). These four films offer models of cross-cultural exchange that pose alternatives to the paranoid logic of the Shanghai gesture demonstrated in the Hollywood films I discuss in the earlier chapters. What is at stake in all of them, I claim, is the problem of how to represent an other in a way that does not presume to uncover an authentic essence, but that also does not rob that other of reality. In chapter 3 I discuss the association of the East with the simulacral and the West with the authentic or original. In other contexts, though, the East has been associated with the authentic and natural, and the West with the linguistic and cultural. While dissimilar in appearance and context, each of the films I discuss in chapter 4 explicitly challenges this mapping of terms and also actively works to deconstruct the binary opposition between East and West. Each of these films works with an aesthetic of hybridity by mixing formal conventions and combining techniques drawn from narrative, documentary, and experimental film in ways that transform and undo common assumptions about these categories. Finally, each of them reflects on notions of possession and ownership and the question of how an image can be said to "belong" to one culture or another.

Antonioni's *Chung Kuo: Cina* implicitly defines national identity not as an essence but as a performative act. While in China, Antonioni and his crew were monitored by representatives of the Communist government, and nearly everything that they filmed was subject to state approval. However, Antonioni made a virtue of this limitation. The result is a film that implicitly problematizes notions of authenticity or truth in ethnographic filmmaking and that, like many of Antonioni's films, embraces an aesthetic of surfaces. This groundbreaking documentary paves the way in my study for an examination of a more experimental piece, Leslie Thornton's *Adynata*, which brings a feminist perspective to the problem of orientalism. The title of Thornton's film is a rhetorical trope meaning the impossibility of expression itself, or a condition of being without the power to speak. Thornton accordingly plays with Said's claim that the Orient "cannot speak for itself," and her film's largely found and appropriated images prompt a

recognition that there is no such thing as an authentic, indigenous representation.

The third section of this chapter turns to Wim Wenders's *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, a film that helps to reimagine the relationship between East and West not as a one-sided mimicry or appropriation, but rather as a layered series of enfolded exchanges. *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* starts out as a portrait of the fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto and ends up a deconstruction of identity, both in the sense of subjective particularity and in the sense of similitude and fidelity of representation. Wenders's combination of various film and video stocks further complicates the relation between technology and representation, as does the loose, notebook-like style of filmmaking that he employs. My reading of this film centers once again upon an Asian object, this time a jacket designed by Yamamoto that Wenders describes in voice-over. This jacket, Wenders relates, reminded him of his father; in fact, he says that it "expressed 'father' better than words." In this jacket, Wenders continues, he experienced a strange sensation: "I saw [myself] more me than before . . . I was myself." Yamamoto's jacket provides a metaphor for a notion of the self that comes from elsewhere, a self that is predicated and thrives on a relationship with alterity. Following the section on Wenders, I conclude chapter 4 with a reading of Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, a film that relates a feminist, utopian fantasy of a hijacking along the Trans-Siberian Railway. When a group of female European and American travelers are taken hostage, they find that their captors are not hostile; instead, the travelers opt to stay on as honored guests at a Mongolian festival. The first half of the film is composed largely of images of the Westerners on the train and is shot with a high degree of artifice; the second half in the Mongolian steppe is filmed in a looser style with longer shots and takes. I suggest that the film's apparent mapping of fiction onto the West and documentary onto the East is more complex than it initially appears. Upon closer analysis, Ottinger's images of Mongolia are just as constructed as those of the West, and her images of the West also have the ontological gravity that is more often associated with ethnographic or documentary film.

The final chapter of this book, "The Lost Girls," analyzes Sophie Calle's image and text installation *Exquisite Pain* (2003) and Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* (2003). The two objects of analysis

that I have paired together in this chapter differ from one another in national origin, production context, and media format. However, they belong together in other respects. Both pieces tell stories of young Western women abroad in Tokyo for the first time. Calle's *Exquisite Pain*, a narrative work composed of photographic images and text, lends itself easily to analysis in terms borrowed from the cinema. The narrator of *Exquisite Pain* is distracted during a trip to Japan by her preoccupation with a father-like lover she has left behind in France. Similarly, in *Lost in Translation* Charlotte is intrigued by Tokyo's otherness but protected from its siren call by her relationship to Bob, a fading B-level actor whom she meets at the Park Hyatt Hotel. In *Exquisite Pain* and *Lost in Translation* the threat of the Orient is assuaged through the intervention of a paternal figure. Although both of these texts ultimately send their lost girls back into the found safety of familiar, Oedipally patterned relationships, these characters at times serve as conduits for a reciprocal translation between East and West along the way. At moments, that is, they embrace the loss of geographic and psychical bearings and the encounter with alterity that Japan offers. Some of the lost girl's suitability for this purpose, I suggest, can be explained in terms of the psychical detours that Freud at times ascribes to female subjectivity.

In this final chapter I theorize a notion of reciprocity in translation: an encounter with alterity through or in spite of the barriers of familiarity that may be erected against it. I do so through Walter Benjamin's metaphor of the wall and the arcade in "The Task of the Translator," a text that is cited by both Laplanche and Rey Chow. I also interpret the stories of Calle's and Coppola's narrators and their travels alongside Freud's story of the female Oedipus complex. This story, through the various incarnations and transformations that it undergoes throughout Freud's career, can be read parallel to the narratives of the young woman abroad. Read in such a way, Freud's texts can lead to the conclusion that the experience of being psychically abroad and the discovery of internal foreignness may be prototypical aspects of female subjectivity. Drawing on the writings of Ackbar Abbas, I also consider in this chapter whether the notion of cosmopolitanism can provide a solution to the problem of orientalism. I conclude that neither cosmopolitanism nor a notion of authentic Asian subjectivity provides a sustainable alternative. Rather, the work of challenging orientalism

must happen through continued and endless processes of translation and detranslation of the psychical enigmas of alterity, noting where traces of internal alterity are suppressed and where they are made visible and all the while knowing full well that there is no original that can ever successfully be recovered.

Even when we think we are creating,
we are always being worked by foreign messages.
—JEAN LAPLANCHE, "The Kent Seminar"

1 THE ENIGMATIC SIGNIFIER

Jean Laplanche offers a psychoanalytic theory with a difference. That difference is his insistence on an alterity inscribed at the very heart of subjectivity and on the absolute primacy of concrete, particular other human beings in the implantation of this alterity and the constitution of the self. In *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche provides a rereading of Freud's theory of primal repression and the formation of the unconscious. For Laplanche, the unconscious is a repository not of taboo desires or repressed memories but rather of signifiers that are proffered to an infant subject by adults. Like a traveler with only rudimentary language skills, Laplanche's developmental allegory goes, the infant simply fails to comprehend these signs. Laplanche calls these messages "enigmatic signifiers" in adapting and expanding upon a phrase first used by Lacan in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud."[1] A smile, a caress, a string of babble—all of these can assume the role of enigmatic signifiers because the infant is of necessity at least partially in the dark about their meaning, intention, and affective tone. A touch may be both loving and brusque; a sigh may express contentment or irritation.

Laplanche notes that he uses "enigma" (in French, *l'énigme*) to translate Freud's German word *Rätsel*, which can also be translated as "riddle." As Laplanche notes, though, this German word refers to something more than a "simple riddle" or puzzle, which in the French he calls *une devinette*. Unlike a simple riddle, Laplanche tells us, an enigma "can only be proposed by someone who does not master the

answer."[2] This is why an enigma differs from a mystery (*mystère*); the latter presumes a theological subject who holds the answer. Unlike a riddle, to which there is a correct answer or solution if only one can reason it out, and unlike a mystery, which lacks a specific answer but does have an explanation in the theological or supernatural realm, the Laplanchean enigma has no answer at all.

These signifiers are thus doubly enigmatic. Not only does the infant lack the resources to decode them, but also they are permeated with meanings of which even their senders are unaware (Laplanche calls the messages "opaque to recipient and transmitter alike").[3] No one, not even the most responsible parent, can retain absolute control over the multiple possible meanings that gestures or sounds may express or over the way that a child will receive her utterances. As Laplanche writes, "The adult world is entirely infiltrated with unconscious and sexual significations to which the *adults themselves* do not possess the code."[4] These signifiers produce "remainders" in the unconscious, bits that are irremediably lost in translation, and they are passed in some form from generation to generation. They are neither tied to anatomy or gender nor depend on any particular structure of kinship. Rather, they are present for any subject who has ever been addressed by an other and been cognizant of the fact of being addressed, yet unsure about the precise sense of the message. Despite the universality of this experience, these signifiers are particular because they vary according to the circumstances and individuals involved in each address.

The arrival of the enigmatic signifier is a foundational moment, a primal seduction that inaugurates sexuality and desire. As John Fletcher explains, "The relation to the other and his or her encrypted desire and its possible meanings is inscribed in the very constitution of human subjectivity."[5] This inaugural moment does not happen once and for all, and neither is its trauma fully bound once the infant subject has improved her verbal comprehension or honed her ability to read body language. Rather, these enigmatic signifiers will become what Laplanche calls "source objects" of the drive. They continue to exert a pull from the unconscious throughout the course of the subject's life, thereby perpetually inviting the subject to translate and understand them. As Cathy Caruth has suggested in her studies of trauma, Laplanchean subjectivity is constituted by and through a trauma of not knowing: enigmatic signification reflects that which "resists simple

comprehension . . . what it is, in traumatic events, that is *not* precisely grasped."[6] The traumatic originary scenario furthermore can be repeated or retriggered throughout the subject's life at any time that she receives an ambiguous message from someone else.

THE UNFINISHED COPERNICAN REVOLUTION
Once upon a Time

I turn now to a work of contemporary art that is in many ways completely unlike the others that I will discuss in this book and yet is compelling for its illustration of an archetypal scenario of enigmatic signification. *Once upon a Time* (2002), an extraordinary installation by the British artist Steve McQueen, creates a kind of laboratory scenario for its viewers, an enactment of the transmission of an alien, ambiguous message. The piece consists of a series of 116 still photographs that are projected in sequence onto a large wall. They form a curiously ranging collection of images, strange in their selection but familiar or even banal in content: children gathered around a globe in a classroom, an illustration of the molecular structure of water with the label "H_2O," a man with sun-burned hands eating grapes, diagrams showing international units of measurement and their conversion factors, a woman shopping in a supermarket, a smiling family seated at a dinner table, a photograph of the United Nations building in New York, and so on. The still images are edited together with slow, lingering dissolves, and the film stock is slightly grainy and a bit muted in color. The soundtrack consists of voices speaking what seems at first to be a hodgepodge of many languages. Although one strains to understand the voices, they are rich in affective tone and rhythm and they occasionally accelerate or reach a crescendo as if expressing something of great urgency. The glow of the images and the gentle dissolves between them create a soothing sensation. The darkness of the room and the vast amount of space they take up on the wall are suggestive of the cinema. The large scale auraticizes the images, thereby creating an almost religious or cosmic effect. It is as if the viewer is a guest at a planetarium or a tourist gazing up at a giant display at a natural history museum. Although the words on the soundtrack are opaque, the pairing of silent images with nondiegetic sound evokes the conventions of documentary film—in particular, the educational science or

Children around a globe: an image from McQueen's *Once upon a Time* (2002). (NASA/JPL-Caltech)

ethnographic program. The effect is hypnotic; the combination of the large-scale projected images and the lulling, unintelligible sounds seem almost to reproduce the scenario of primal seduction.

Initially, the viewer is at a loss to make sense of the images, and the soundtrack does nothing to clarify why the particular pictures have been chosen, how they relate to one another, or what they aim to communicate. However, the viewer who has read the publicity information accompanying the exhibit will know that the images are in fact culled from those stowed on the *Voyager II* space probe that NASA sent into space in 1977, which still roams the universe thirty years later and now claims the title of the human-made object that is most distant from the earth.[7] Originally assembled with the help of the SETI project (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence), chaired by Carl Sagan, the images belong to a collection referred to as the Golden Record. The collection consists of pictures, verbal greetings written in various languages, and audio samples of "sounds of earth," all recorded on a gold-plated record for inclusion in the probe and addressed to any intelligent life-form that might happen to find them. Their aim was indeed ethnographic, of humanity as a whole. As a greeting from President Jimmy Carter recorded on the disc says, "This is a present from a small,

distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings . . . We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilizations. This record represents our hope and our determination, and our good will in a vast and awesome universe."

The content of the soundtrack of McQueen's installation is also explained in the literature accompanying the installation: it is glossolalia, voices speaking in tongues. If we have attempted in vain to understand it, that is because it is untranslatable. The glossolalia might additionally alert us to the fact that the images, too, are addressed to an alien audience that presumably lacks whatever dictionary might be required to decipher them. Like Laplanche's adult parent who speaks in affectively charged babble to an infant who initially has no way to understand its content or intention, so NASA projects its collection of images and sounds out to an interstellar audience composed of members who are likewise newcomers to humanity. In turn, McQueen projects these same images and unintelligible sounds out to an unknown audience of museum goers. In this way his installation—like any work of art whose meaning is not immediately transparent—places spectators in the position of being the recipient-decoders of an enigmatic signifier.

In "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," Laplanche refers to a similar "message in a bottle" that was planted on the rocket ship *Pioneer 10* in 1972. Laplanche uses this example to draw a distinction between two aspects of signification, both of which go beyond the notion of decoding a sign's meaning or referent: "Whatever the fabric of this message and the inventiveness shown by its authors, all the difference resides—if we place ourselves on the side of the receiver—between, on the one hand, finding a rocket and detecting in its construction the *indices* of the presence of intelligent beings and, on the other, receiving *signifiers* which, without presupposing any shared code or interpretive rule, testify to the intention to communicate and, perhaps, to conscious and even unconscious reasons for such an intention."[8] Laplanche makes the important observation that the rocket itself already testifies to the presence of intelligence of some kind: it is an artifact, an index in Charles Peirce's terms, that indicates the presence of someone or something that had the capacity to produce it. But as Laplanche implies, there is a sense in which the inclusion of a message is redundant, for an alien being endowed with deductive ca-

pabilities similar to our own—ignoring, as NASA did, the relative likeliness or absurdity of this premise—could infer many of the scientific principles offered therein simply by taking apart the rocket. The inclusion of a message thus testifies to something beyond the simple presence of a technologically advanced life-form. It reveals a desire to communicate and the fact of the existence of a system of signs for so doing. Referencing Lacan, Laplanche invokes the image of "hieroglyphs in the desert" or "cuneiform characters carved on a tablet of stone": we know they intend to signify something to us, but we cannot necessarily ascribe a signified to them.[9] Laplanche optimistically suggests that such signs might reveal not only the desire to communicate but also something about the whys and hows of this desire. Something might get across, in other words, about the senders' hopes and anxieties, their assumptions regarding the addressee, and so on. "I hope that you will be impressed by my people's accomplishments," or "I assume you are just as curious about me as I am about you" are possible such meanings; "I am trusting that you will not use this information to destroy me" might be another.

This, Laplanche tells us, is the function of the enigmatic signifier. The Laplanchean subject, like our hypothetical alien, is implicitly invited to decode not only the informational meanings in the message—the principles of mathematics and chemistry, the existence of complex societies, and so on—but also the affective and intersubjective ones. What does the one who offers this message want from me? Is there an ulterior motive, a catch? How am I expected to reply? This is what makes the enigmatic signifier inherently traumatic and sexual for Laplanche: the fact that a solicitation is involved, one that implicates my desire, and that this solicitation is fundamentally ambiguous (for both parties, no less). As Laplanche repeatedly reminds us, the enigma is "a *seduction*": etymologically a leading astray, similar to what Lacan calls a "lure" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*.[10] This address furthermore raises deep-seated questions about how one is to relate to another person. In its very failure to communicate, the enigma ends up signifying the impossibility of ever completely knowing what another person is thinking, feeling, or desiring in relation to oneself (if not the impossibility of relationality *tout court*).

The Laplanchean subject is thus, needless to say, not an especially happy one. As Laplanche notes, the enigmatic signifier is "conflict-full, conflictual."[11] The subject whose desire is constituted through and in

relation to this signifier may become obsessed with decoding the desire of the other. In ventriloquizing Freud's infamous question, "What does woman want?" Laplanche suggests that the result of this wondering is that "woman" is unfortunately positioned as "forever mysterious, strange, and therefore apparently hostile."[12] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit provide an astute gloss upon this aspect of the Laplanchean subject in their book *Caravaggio's Secrets*, and they help us to understand its consequences. They suggest that the Laplanchean subject may harbor "a tendency (operating in varying degrees) to structure relations on the basis of an eroticizing mystification."[13] In a world where desire is inaugurated by the enigma, that is, one may find oneself drawn to relationships modeled upon dynamics of secrecy and probing, withholding and pursuit, confusion and surprise. The other is fascinating, for he or she is presumed to know something that would affirm or deny one's desires and one's sense of self. However, this other is also distressing or even infuriating because he or she fails to deliver up this knowledge. In such situations, Bersani and Dutoit add, it "becomes reasonable to confront the world with paranoid mistrust."[14]

Fascinatingly, Bersani and Dutoit link the paranoid aspect of Laplanchean desire to the quest for knowledge and the desire for epistemological mastery. They observe that in Western civilization—"at least since Oedipus"—the riddle of the enigmatic signifier has dominated the pursuit of knowledge and, moreover, "has been fantasized as provisional."[15] The prospect of cracking an enigma, any enigma, is surely a tantalizing one for most of us. However, the idea that one might completely undo the enigmatic signifier or decrypt the other's desire is precisely a fantasy. Classical cinema offers us many familiar examples of this understanding of desire as an epistemological problem: the femme fatale is both sexy and threatening because her desire is utterly baffling (as in Vidor's *Gilda*); the uncommunicative lothario becomes yet more attractive but also frightening because he seems to know something that we do not (as in Hitchcock's *Suspicion*). It is only logical to respond to this situation with distrust of others, or even paranoia. This paranoid response can ultimately take violent forms: the fantasy that the enigma can be fully shaken forth from the other lies behind the most relentless forms of interrogation. To take another example from film noir, one might consider the well-known scene in *Chinatown* where Jake Gittes slaps Evelyn Mulwray in order to shake forth her secret.

Fortunately, Bersani and Dutoit propose alternative forms of relationality and connectedness, many of which they find in Caravaggio's paintings, and more of which they discover in the cinema in their book *Forms of Being.* For them, the curve of an outstretched arm in a painting can trace an unexpected line of connection between two figures, one not suggested by the conventions of the painting's genre. In their reading of *The Thin Red Line* (Malick, 1998), characters' faces in close-up redefine the relationship between self and external world, for "their world is inscribed on their faces."[16] In this vein we may glean further possibilities from another look at McQueen's installation. What if we were to look for possible meanings in these images, to sort out the various ways they might be "translated" and received? A viewer attempting to make sense of this collection of images—not knowing in advance that they constituted a message in a bottle stowed on a spacecraft—might draw any number of conclusions regarding their original context and their creators' intentions. For example, a didactic tone may be deduced fairly quickly: there are slides showing abstract diagrams and equations that demonstrate basic principles of physics and chemistry, and these are often followed by photographs illustrating their worldly counterparts and applications. A slide showing the molecular structure of water is followed by an image of a surfer in the ocean, with an "H_2O" label in its corner. A photograph of a string quartet follows an image of a musical score with a violin beside it.

Following the editing cues we might connect the symbolic "signs" (numbers, equations) to their "referents" in the photographs. We might also draw connections of a paradigmatic nature: the diagrams might all belong together, whereas the photographs might form a class unto themselves. We might form a narrative from these images, perhaps even a narrative of origins and development: first comes water, then grapes, then people, then the United Nations building. Or we might search for formal connections: the spherical shape of the earth globe in one slide echoes the shape of a grape in another; the color blue of the ocean is the same blue as that of the sky in an image of the Great Wall of China. These formal cues might in turn lead us to posit causal connections: a grape is spherical because of the laws of physics; the water is blue because of its reflective properties. We might even read these images as collisions of cells, in the manner of Eisensteinian montage: a political message, probably unintended by NASA, can be gleaned from the juxtaposition of the rugged worker harvesting grapes

with the image of the woman eating them in the supermarket. Any principle of film editing—continuity, graphic match, eyeline match, or any other mode of syntagm formation—could be invoked here and used to infer another meaning from these images.

There is an almost infinite number of possible such connections. However, the message one takes away from *Once upon a Time* is ultimately all and none of these, for the vast number of possible translations ensures that the question of subjectivity will be posed over and over again and that a univocal answer is impossible. To be sure, there are informational messages aplenty on the Golden Record: "This is a water-based life-form," "The people of this society take pleasure in music," "Humans have the technology to erect complex architectural structures." But the core message here—the one that is implicit in all of these and that returns us to Laplanche's notion of "signifying *to*"—says something like, "I want to show you who I am." It is that of a subject trying its best to represent itself to an other, addressing someone, projecting an image of itself to an other, and thereby betraying the fact of desire. These others—be they extraterrestrial life-forms or museum goers—are *always*, by definition, alien and unknown in some way. Still more radically, for Laplanche, the "I" who wants to represent is other to itself, in that it is constituted by the implantation of similarly alien messages. As Rimbaud famously put it, this "I" is an other.

THE OTHER IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

While Laplanche grants the other absolute primacy in his theory of the subject, nowhere does he suggest that we inhabit this condition happily. Indeed, resistance to internal alterity, and the hostile projection of this alterity outward, account for a great deal of woes, ranging from individual cases of neurosis to collective xenophobia. Psychoanalysis in general has been faulted for its failure to address the question of race. As David Eng notes in *Racial Castration*, "Detractors of psychoanalytic theory have justifiably noted that, in its insistent privileging of sexuality as the organizing principle of subjectivity . . . psychoanalysis has little to offer the study of race or processes of racialization. Indeed, psychoanalytic, feminist, and queer theories have traditionally had the same conceptual blind spot: these are all critical discourses that emphasize sexual difference over and above every other type of social difference."[17] At bottom, this critique is inseparable from the fact that

classical psychoanalysis tends to posit a solipsistic subject, one ruled more by internal, unconscious fantasies than by the offerings of the external world and its other inhabitants. As Bersani has put it, in psychoanalytic thought "relationality is grounded in antagonism and misapprehension, which means that to meet the world is always to see the world as a place where I am not."[18] Psychoanalysis is not alone in participating in a Cartesian skepticism about and general disengagement from the world, or in positing an essentially idealist subject. As Hannah Arendt points out in *The Human Condition*, this model of subjectivity has tended to dominate Western philosophy for centuries, and the "repudiation of the earth" and subsequent turn inward have been commonplace not just since Descartes but also since the earliest days of Christian thought.[19] Thus, we should not place particular blame on psychoanalytic theory for this trend, and it is important to recognize that psychoanalysis at the very least offers an extraordinarily durable theory of desire, sexual difference, and sexuality. But the problem of the place of the other—and not simply the internal other of the unconscious but rather concrete other people in the world—still presents a pressing challenge. It is one that must be addressed first before we can begin to think through cultural or racial difference psychoanalytically.

To the critics of psychoanalysis' supposed anthropocentricity, one might object that Freud's very positing of the unconscious had the effect of displacing the human subject from the center of the world, a project that Laplanche, citing Freud, referred to as "the unfinished Copernican revolution" and which he endeavored to bring to completion in his essay of the same title. Lacan, too, had already provided a critique of the solipsistic, self-possessed subject of psychoanalysis before Laplanche. Lacan's strategy was to unmask this subject by suggesting that its illusion of mastery and self-sufficiency is predicated on a fundamental misrecognition or *méconnaissance*, that is, a mistaking of the *moi* or ego for the *je* or subject proper. Whereas the *moi* or ego gets its sense of coherence and security from the glossy, deceptive mirror image of the Imaginary, the *je* is founded on lack—a lack installed by the entry into language. In brief, the entry into language splits the young subject into an "I" who speaks and an "I" who is spoken. The lack in question is a fundamental gap between sign and object, for the word "I" will never fully express who I feel myself to be, and neither can it ever fully designate the cacophony of lived experience. Other-

ness does play a constitutive role for the Lacanian subject, but this foundational otherness is for Lacan the Other or *Autre* of language and of the Symbolic. The Other in Lacan is anonymous, abstract, a collection of binary oppositions and pronouns that come to the subject from the social realm and from culture, hence Lacan's pronouncement that psychoanalytic experience discovers "the whole structure of language . . . in the unconscious."[20]

I offer this admittedly reductive synopsis of Lacan's theory of the subject as a way to illustrate Laplanche's differences from his predecessor and colleague; the summary represents a crude version of my understanding of Laplanche's version of Lacan. Although Laplanche acknowledges his debt to Lacan and often quotes his work, and while their theories are certainly not fundamentally opposed, Laplanche finds his colleague's model too deterministic and says that it makes the crucial error of ignoring the role of individual, particular others in the constitution of subjectivity. For Laplanche, it is the concrete other who decenters the subject, and not, as Lacan would have it, "an abstract and purely linguistic conception of the signifier," for such a conception results, as Laplanche puts it, in "the 'Other' being reduced to 'the treasury of signifiers' in a completely impersonal way."[21] In another essay, Laplanche explains his divergence from Lacan thus: "If, for my part, I speak rather of a 'message' [than of language], this is [because] emphasizing 'language' effaces the alterity of the other in favor of trans-individual structure."[22] For Laplanche, Lacan's notion of the Symbolic and the Other privileges impersonal, diachronic structures over the addressing and soliciting aspects of interpersonal communication. It also favors linguistic signs over tactile, visual, and other types of signifiers.[23] For Laplanche, the unconscious is not structured like a language; it is full of chaotic bits of sensory messages received from actual other people.

As I have suggested above, though, Laplanche's amendments to Lacan—we might call them "translations"—are present in nascent form in early Freud. In "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," Laplanche refers to Freud's observations in *Studies on Hysteria* concerning memory, trauma, and the unconscious, in particular Freud's repeated use of the word *fremd* (strange, unknown, unfamiliar, odd, foreign, or alien) to refer to a traumatic memory kernel.[24] In this text, Freud at times describes a psyche that is not merely hampered or encumbered by an externally implanted trauma (one that makes its

presence known in hysterical symptoms) but actually is founded upon one. As Laplanche glosses Freud: "'Internal foreign body,' 'reminiscence': the unconscious [is] an alien inside me, and even one put inside me by an alien."[25] However, Laplanche ultimately finds that Freud does not go far enough in his theorization of alterity in the formation and character of the unconscious. Although the early Freud seemed on the brink of this discovery, he limited it to his hysterics and pathologized it. In Freud's later thinking, Laplanche complains, the other "is barely present at all, and then only as an abstract protagonist of a scene or a support for projections."[26] In his most extensive critique of Freud, Laplanche writes: "Freud vacillates between two equally inadequate positions. On one side, what could be termed a subjectivist, 'internal' conception—reducing the other to the subject's perception of the other . . . Nothing in this approach allows the other any place other than in the depths of my subjectivity. And then alongside this, from time to time, a philosophically more naïve gesture, consisting in . . . going to look for the other in the neighboring room."[27] The other is inaccessible except through the lens of one's internal fantasies; the other is transparently accessible in the room next door—for Laplanche both conceptions are inadequate, thus leading to the twin dead-ends of absolute solipsism and naive realism. It is through a notion of the other as constitutive of the subject from the first interactions, the first exchange of messages, that Laplanche escapes this binary. The other is present, to be sure: she is more than a hallucination, more than a figment of fantasy wrapped around another human being whose real existence we cannot completely verify. However, neither is she just around the corner in brute, unfiltered form. Rather, the other is present as the bearer of a message, as the one who communicates a desire—a desire that will nevertheless remain, to some degree, permanently enigmatic. As Laplanche puts it, there is a "third reality" here: in addition to perceptual reality and psychological reality, there is the reality of the "message, i.e. of the signifier in so far as it is addressed by someone to someone"—a category that Laplanche notes is "practically absent from Freud's thought."[28]

There are yet further philosophical and ethical stakes for the model of subjectivity that Laplanche proposes and his revisions to Freud, Lacan, and object-relations psychoanalysis. His reformulation of the relation of other to self is not merely a matter of more accurately describing infantile development, and neither are its consequences

limited to the analytic situation. Rather, it represents a radical decentering of the subject, a continuation of what Laplanche calls the "unfinished Copernican revolution." In "Implantation, Intromission," Laplanche extends his critique to Melanie Klein and her notion of object-relations psychology, particularly as defined in her essay "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States." He identifies in her thought a similar blind spot to the one he locates in Lacan and in Freud. As Laplanche writes, "By situating the process of projection at the origin . . . Klein took up definitively an idealist position. Everything came from the interior; objects, whether good or bad, only emerged, like rabbits or doves, from the magic box of tricks."[29] The idealist notion of the psychological subject results in a situation in which the subject remains at the center of her activities: master of her world and initiator of all perceptions, be they accurate ones or delusional. This results in a fundamentally anthropocentric conception of the universe, and a universe in which human beings are once and for all closed in on themselves, "irremediably Ptolemaic,"[30] and "monadological" and suffering the "constant threat of narcissistic closure,"[31] as Laplanche puts it at various points in his writings. Laplanche goes on to comment on the way that Klein's thinking shifts away from projection and toward giving primacy to introjection as the initial step. One might think that this shift, which prioritizes what comes in from the outside over what is thrown out from the inside, would be sufficient for Laplanche, but he finds that even this way of thinking can be taken further: "There is no doubt some advantage . . . in giving priority to introjection in the play between projection and introjection. Introjection—and its most visible modality, repression—indicates that the subject first takes something inside itself, setting up an unconscious, before constituting through projection a sexual object-world . . . Nonetheless, to introject or project, repress, symbolize or affirm are verbs and processes whose subject, both grammatical and real, is 'the subject,' the individual himself."[32] While Laplanche concurs with Klein in granting primacy to introjection over projection—there must be an alterity implanted within the self prior to the desire to purge the self of this alterity—he critiques the notion that these psychical processes are initiated or controlled by the subject in question. As Laplanche continues: "*I* project, *I* disavow, *I* foreclose, etc. What has been scotomized? Quite simply, the discovery that *the process originally comes from the other.*"[33] This passage perhaps consti-

tutes Laplanche's most vigorous dethroning of the self-possessed subject, who here lacks even the little freedom that Lacan grants us in the form of "full," creative acts of signification.[34] Psychical agency, to the extent that it exists at all, comes to us from the other.

Scholars such as Bersani and Dutoit, as well as Judith Butler, Caruth, Hal Foster, Timothy Murray, Christina Zwarg, and others, have turned to Laplanche for ways of thinking about subjectivity that recognize the primacy of the other in the traumatic constitution of the self.[35] This aspect of Laplanchean theory makes it especially suited to analyses of racism, homophobia, xenophobia, paranoid nationalism, aggressive evangelism, and similar social phenomena. What Laplanche says of woman, paraphrasing Freud's logic, could also be said of cultural others: those who are supposed to harbor unknown desires are fated to remain "forever mysterious, strange, and therefore apparently hostile."[36] In fact, Laplanche himself points us in this direction in a suggestive footnote: "In the face of the alterity of the other, the methods of defense are immutably the same: attempt at assimilation, denial of difference, segregation, destruction. These are quite clearly found again in attitudes to cultural and ethnic differences. But what is lacking in all the analyses of 'racism' is any consideration of the internal split inherent in the other himself: it is this *internal alterity* which is at the root of the anxiety provoked by the external alterity; it is this that one seeks to reduce at any price."[37] Racism and its cousins can be, and have been, understood as paranoid projections of the subject's own intolerable or inexplicable desires and anxieties onto figures of alterity. As Freud had already noted in his studies of paranoid projection, the repressed returns: what is abolished internally returns from without; what the psyche rejects will inevitably crop up somewhere in the external world.[38] But here Laplanche goes a step further by suggesting that the desires and anxieties rejected as "foreign" are in fact inscribed at the very core of one's own subjectivity. Assimilation, appropriation, aggression, infantilization, or emasculation—all the psychical strategies commonly associated with racism—are for Laplanche driven by the desire to eradicate or bind an *internal* otherness, implanted in the form of the enigmatic signifier and revived by an encounter with an other. However, they are not so easily segregated; their eradication would in fact be tantamount to the destruction of the self.

In *Essays on Otherness*, Laplanche does not follow up on the suggestive remarks in the footnote quoted above. Indeed, the fact that the

topic of race surfaces only in a footnote could be read as an instance of the repressed returning from outside the confines of the main textual body. Aside from rare moments, race can be seen as a primal repression of psychoanalytic theory as a whole. It is more than an ordinary blind spot, more than an omission to be rectified by addition and supplementation. In Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, the figures of the primitive and the homosexual are not merely taken for granted in the account of the slaying of the primal father; rather, they are structuring absences upon which Freud's theory depends and is propped. As David Eng has suggested, Freud thereby fails to see the extent to which race and sexuality become intertwined in this text.[39] In an analogous gesture, but for the footnote quoted above, Laplanche allows race to take on a similar structuring role by omission. In light of his passionate insistence on the role of concrete human others in the constitution of subjectivity, it is unfortunate that he refrains from extending his analysis to the social and cultural features and circumstances that mark some humans as "more other." However, his omission invites and encourages further inquiry. What is clear is that the other in Laplanche may appear not only in the form of the cast of characters who populate psychoanalytic discourse—mothers, love-objects, analysts, and so on—but also in the form of entire peoples, cultures, and, as will be of particular concern in the next section of this chapter and in the remainder of this book, modes of signification.

THE HIEROGLYPH

In an essay about the filmmaker Ulrike Ottinger published in 1993, Brenda Longfellow suggests that Ottinger's interest in Mongolia "might well be situated in relationship to the contemporary moment in which western cultural theory—from Derrida's deployment of the hieroglyph to elucidate the scriptural origins of language, to Deleuze and Guattari's nomadology, to Barthes' journeys through the empire of signs in Japan—turns to the East as a site of radical alterity."[40] Two of Longfellow's examples, Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and Barthes's *Empire of Signs*, pertain expressly to writing and signification, and the third, Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, addresses questions of the semiotic throughout, if less directly in the section on nomadology and the war machine. At first glance, these texts might seem to be complicit with a common Western understanding of "oriental" lin-

guistic systems as figurative, hieroglyphic, iconic, or pictorial; as closer to the primitive, the pre-verbal, the Imaginary, or the Real; and as further away from the civilized, the mature, the abstract, the conceptual, and the Symbolic. This set of assumptions connects to what John DeFrancis calls the "ideographic myth"—that is, the notion that Chinese characters, from which both the Japanese and Korean systems of writing are derived, are ideographic or pictorial rather than phonetic.[41] Even if their forms can be traced at their origins to pictorial ones, DeFrancis argues, their function in the present is to signify verbally; one of DeFrancis's primary claims is that a writing system based on pictures would no longer be writing as such. Another way of describing this would be to say that Asiatic languages are, in Charles Peirce's terms, "symbolic" sign systems, and not, as is sometimes presumed, "iconic" ones: their usage is governed by socially agreed-upon codes of grammar and usage rather than by principles of resemblance. Rey Chow suggests that Derrida perpetuates this myth in *Of Grammatology*, and she writes that "the implications of DeFrancis' observation are staggering when we recall how Derrida's early work invokes Chinese 'ideographic' writing as *the* metaphor for difference from 'western' phonocentrism."[42] Chow also notes that in scholarly studies of Chinese literature the Chinese literary tradition is assumed to be "metonymic, literal, immanentist, and self-referential."[43] The Chinese language also tends to be associated with a "primitive logic," and its speakers constructed as "literal-minded . . . noble savage[s]."[44]

Miriam Bratu Hansen traces how the metaphor of the hieroglyph figures in writings on mass cultural imagery by members of the Frankfurt school and other interpreters of modernity. Her essay "Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer" tracks this metaphor's ambivalent political significance. Siegfried Kracauer, she notes, uses culturally inflected words like "hieroglyph," "ornament," "rebus," and "arabesque" to describe ephemeral phenomena associated with everyday life and mass culture under capitalism.[45] In Kracauer's landmark essay "The Mass Ornament" he analyzes an aesthetic form that he associates with the rise of fascism: large-scale, shifting geometric patterns formed by human actors assembled together in a stadium or similar location, such as those seen in the Nuremberg rallies, in Busby Berkeley's musicals of the 1930s, and, more recently, in the opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympics as choreographed by the director Zhang Yimou. In these patterns Kracauer sees evidence of

a modern split between reason and nature. The mass ornament as spectacle form, Kracauer says, is part of the culture of surface and symptomatic of the heightened abstraction, paradigmatic thinking, and shift from immanence to transcendence that accompanies the turn to capital and the disenchantment of the world. In place of whole human subjects, the mass ornament offers up interchangeable body parts that have been abstracted. In Horkheimer's and Adorno's account, as Hansen notes, "the historical process of disenchantment . . . inevitably entails a dissociation of verbal and pictorial functions."[46] Just as reason "orphans" nature when it should have "penetrated" it more fully in Kracauer's account of the mass ornament, so the image is abandoned by the linguistic sign and left to fend for itself. The problem with this split is that we are no longer able to "read" nature, material objects, or other perceptual phenomena; they become reified, "mummified," and mute, to invoke some of Kracauer's vocabulary throughout this essay.

On the one hand, this dissociation of nature from culture, and image from word, results, as Hansen states, in the relegation of language to a "mere system of signs . . . an instrument of recognizing nature by renouncing any similarity with it." However, there is "another genealogy" implied in Adorno's account, one that "traces the fall of language as a movement from an originary *written* language to a demythologized language described in *phonological*, Sausserian terms."[47] According to this reading, which is reminiscent of Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, writing too is left stranded in the wake of rationalization, due to its contamination by the graphic. In a twist ending, though, just at the moment when the project of abstraction seems nearly complete, modern mass culture revives the hieroglyph. It does so not as a rich, prelapsarian form of language in which word and image would still converge, but instead as what Marx calls a "social hieroglyph." This new hieroglyph is the reified commodity, which can only serve as fodder for regressive consumption. The category of "script," previously associated with graphic writing, now takes the form of a protocol or program to be carried out by blindly mimetic consumers who remain culturally illiterate, caught in what Hansen calls the "identificatory spell" of commodity capital.[48]

Film is one of the primary sites where what Adorno calls the "hieroglyph" is mobilized in modern mass culture and is one of modernity's signature commodities. Hansen notes that the metaphor of cinema as

hieroglyph "appears rather early and frequently in the discourse on film throughout the silent era . . . In the United States, the poet Vachel Lindsay advertised film as a new 'American hieroglyphics' as early as 1915."[49] Whereas the Frankfurt school greeted this form with either suspicion or downright condemnation, others embraced its possibilities. Sergei Eisenstein, whom Hansen refers to in passing in her essay, is a key exemplar. Eisenstein deploys the metaphor of the Japanese hieroglyph in several of his key theoretical texts on film in ways that on the surface might be viewed as participating in the myth of the ideograph that DeFrancis and Chow identify in certain strands of Chinese linguistic and literary studies. However, I would like to suggest that upon closer reading Eisenstein's texts in fact complicate this assumption; they make difficult any easy mapping of "image" onto the East and "language" onto the West. His writings also implicitly trouble the distinction between illiterate cultural consumers of the film-hieroglyph-commodity on the one hand and savvy Marxist intellectual critics of it on the other.

Two essays in the collection *Film Form* are of particular interest: "The Unexpected," which Eisenstein wrote in 1928 after seeing a performance by Ichikawa Sadanji's troupe of Kabuki players who were touring Russia; and "The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram," an essay that Eisenstein wrote in 1929 as an afterword to a pamphlet on Japanese cinema by N. Kaufman. In the latter of these two essays, Eisenstein proposes to catalogue "the cinematic traits of Japanese culture that lie outside the Japanese cinema."[50] The most pertinent of these is a trait that he attributes to the Japanese language, which he describes as "the combination of two hieroglyphs" to create a conceptual meaning that arises from their conjunction, or an "ideogram."[51] Eisenstein likens this process to his own theory of cinematic montage, as a dialectical collision of ideas that gives rise to revolutionary political and intellectual meanings. In addition to what he calls "hieroglyphic" language, Eisenstein also make metaphoric use of forms of Japanese poetry and drama throughout the essay.

One might claim that Eisenstein's metaphors are premised upon the myth of Asiatic languages as ideographic, and thus accuse him of appropriating Japanese culture for a Western theory of film or of idealizing it for a Soviet political agenda. For some, the discussion might simply be over at that point. However, such a reading ignores the complexity of Eisenstein's extended metaphorical linking of Japan and

cinema, which took shape over a period of many years and which yields additional meanings under further scrutiny. "The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram" is peppered with words like "natural," "primitive," "visual," "imagistic," "realistic," and "organic," and Eisenstein applies them to both Japanese representational forms and filmic ones. However, even within this essay the meaning of these words shifts dramatically over the course of the writing. At first, Eisenstein seems to attribute a primitive naturalism to Japan, to idealize that naturalism, and to prescribe it for those who would create a political cinema. But by the end of the essay Eisenstein seems to be suggesting something else: namely, that it is in fact Western representational conventions that adhere too closely to primitive naturalism. In working through Eisenstein's movements of thought in this text and a related one, "Film Form: New Problems," I hope to show that while Eisenstein might begin from a premise of Japan's ineluctable alterity he ends up deconstructing a whole host of binary oppositions projected onto the split between East and West and, along the way, reimagining the relationship between language and images. This project is shared by many of the filmmakers that I address in chapter 4 of this study, particularly Ulrike Ottinger, who maps "image" onto "Asia" and "language" onto "Europe" only to turn around and dismantle that opposition.

Eisenstein praises the way that, in his own characterization, "material," "representational" signs in Japanese linguistic and dramatic forms are mobilized for conceptual thought. From the combination of two "depictables," he writes, "is achieved the representation of something that is graphically undepictable . . . each, separately, corresponds to an *object*, to a fact, but their combination corresponds to a *concept*." He lists a few examples: "The picture for water and the picture of an eye signifies 'to weep'; the picture of an ear near the drawing of a door = 'to listen.'"[52] Eisenstein imputes a revolutionary quality to this syntactic mode and identifies it with both a materialist politics and the beginnings of an "intellectual cinema." At first, he seems to privilege the conceptual, intellectual meaning that arises from the "copulation" of two pictures over the value of the pictures themselves, which are merely the raw material. Soon, though, he writes, "Imagistic thinking displaced to a definite degree, becomes transformed to conceptual thinking . . . It is uncertain in Japanese writing whether its predominating aspect is a system of characters (denotative), or as an independent creation of graphics (depictive). In any case, born by the dual

mating of the depictive by method, and the denotative by purpose, the ideogram continued both these lines (not consecutive historically but consecutive in principle in the minds of those developing the method)."[53] Eisenstein notes here that the movement from "depiction" to "denotation" is a movement of thought where both "lines" are present simultaneously rather than as an historical evolution. The implication of the parable he is telling is that Western alphabetic language somehow dropped the depictive element somewhere along the way, and in so doing lost the link between "images" and "conceptual thinking." Immanent meanings gave way to transcendent ones, and as a result conceptual thinking became divorced both from images and from material objects. Thought came to seem antithetical to the image as well as to matter.

Eisenstein finds the inspiration for how he can go about reconnecting thought and images in Japanese representational conventions. He is also inspired by these models to think about how signs might convey more affect or "mood."[54] Although he does not use psychoanalytic language here, he suggests that these models allow for a closer approximation of human mental processes, along the lines of what Hugo Münsterberg had argued in 1916. As Münsterberg put it, one should strive for a cinema in which "reality . . . [is] shaped by the demands of our soul . . . the outer world itself [is] molded in accordance with our fleeting turns of attention."[55] One example that Eisenstein provides of this affectively charged means of expression again seems at first to align Japan with "primitive naturalism." He describes a method of calligraphy and drawing instruction used in Japanese schools, where a cherry tree is depicted with "close ups hewn out on the page" alongside the tree.[56] Eisenstein calls this "the disproportionate depiction of an event," whereby the artist lends emphasis to what is important in the picture through repetition and enlargement. He likens this process to a child's drawing once shown to him by a psychology professor, in which the young artist chose to depict the act of lighting a stove with the matches drawn disproportionately large in order to emphasize their relative importance in the scene as well as to convey the sense of danger attached to this object. This mode of representation, Eisenstein says, is "organically natural to us from the beginning."[57] By contrast, "the representation of objects in the actual (absolute) proportions proper to them is, of course, merely a tribute to orthodox formal logic.

A subordination to the inviolable order of things . . . Absolute realism is by no means the correct form of perception."[58]

What Eisenstein means by "primitive naturalism" seems to differ from what he calls "organic naturalism." Later in "The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram" he describes a technique from Japanese theater that he calls "disintegrated acting," in which the actor uses only one body part at a time. Like the inclusion of close-ups in a drawing, this technique allows the artist to direct the spectator's attention to what is conceptually or affectively noteworthy. "Freed from the yoke of primitive naturalism," Eisenstein writes, "the actor is enabled by this method to fully grip the spectator by 'rhythms,' making not only acceptable, but definitely attractive, a stage built on the most consecutive and detailed flesh and blood of naturalism."[59] The "yoke of primitive naturalism" in this sentence seems to refer not to the "depictive" but rather to the "orthodox formal logic" that decrees that objects ought to be represented in the same proportions that they have in the external world. Japanese drawing lessons, disintegrated acting, and their kin, by contrast, build their representations on the "flesh and blood" of resemblance, while refusing to subordinate themselves mindlessly to its logic. The "primitive naturalism" that at first seems to characterize Japan thus turns out to be a Western quality. It is Western modes of depiction, Eisenstein ultimately suggests, that tend to pay tribute to the rules of pictographic verisimilitude, whereas Japanese images and forms lend themselves more easily to abstract, conceptual thinking. His terms do shift about, but at times it is almost as though Eisenstein were reversing the direction of DeFrancis's "ideographic myth."

Several years later, in a lecture entitled "Film Form: New Problems" in 1935, Eisenstein would add a third term to the analogy between cinema and the ideogram: the psycholinguistic concept of "inner speech."[60] Inner speech refers to a mental process characterized by open association among mnemic traces, both linguistic and sensual, which are strung together in a way that eschews strict categorical distinctions among words, things, and perceptions. This mode of association is loosely related to Freud's primary process; Eisenstein also occasionally refers to it as "sensual thinking" or "embodied thought." In this essay, Eisenstein adds a caveat to his earlier metaphor of cinematic montage as a manifestation of "early forms of thought-processes" and his prior illustration of this concept through "representational images

current with peoples still at the dawn of culture."[61] He notes the importance of remaining "on guard" when invoking such metaphors because of the risk that they will be adopted by "apologists for the colonial practices of imperialism" and used as "scientific apologia for the methods of enslavement to which such peoples are subjected by white colonizers."[62] In invoking Engels's three stages of historical thought development (Eisenstein characterizes them as the early diffuse-complex, associated with "pictographic thinking" and inner speech; the formal-logical stage that negates it; and the dialectical stage of synthesis), he warns that we are not to assume that these stages occur "in a straight line."[63] Rather, the process of development "marches by continual shifts backwards and forwards, independently of whether it be progressively . . . or retrogressively," and there is a "continual sliding from level to level."[64] What Eisenstein means by "progress" and "retrogression" seems to have more to do with political development toward socialism and away from fascism than with an evolutionary narrative of humankind or culture as such.

The words "ideogram," "pictograph," and "hieroglyphic" accordingly no longer appear in this essay from 1935. In their place Eisenstein speaks of inner speech, sensual thinking, embodied thinking, and the "dual-unity of form and content." These concepts represent a refinement of his earlier theories of montage, and they represent a shift in his thought away from a model based in consciousness-raising and toward an embrace of affect. However, it also seems that the change of metaphor was at least in part prompted by Eisenstein's realization of the potential for harm in his use of the ideogram: its possible appropriation as justification for colonial activity and, with the rise of national socialism, its potential exploitation by proponents of pseudoscientific "race theory."[65] Eisenstein's account also maps the binary opposition between sensual thought and logical thought in less geographical terms and more emphatically in chronological ones—albeit according to a concept of historical development that entails "shifts backwards and forwards" and that is by no means teleological.

Ultimately, although the figures of the hieroglyph and the ideogram drop out of Eisenstein's new program for the cinema, their traces remain in ways that have ramifications for film theory. Given Eisenstein's strong influence on classical cinematic formal conventions and subsequent theories of film, one might argue that certain elements of the cinema that have generally been thought of as having purely

Western origins were influenced at least in part by a fantasy Eastern semiotic alterity. One can find links in "The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram" and in "Film Form: New Problems" to what Miriam Hansen has referred to as cinema's "vernacular modernism."[66] Taken in this light, film techniques such as associative editing patterns, the close-up, and the cutting of space to the measure of human activity and affect no longer seem purely American or Western; they cannot be unproblematically set in contrast to a notion of local, particular Japanese cinematic or visual idioms.

One need not accept this admittedly speculative argument regarding the significance of Japan in Eisenstein's film theory and its influence on classical cinematic conventions in order to see that the binary opposition between East and West plays an overlooked role in his thought. Furthermore, in these essays the task of attempting to think through the differences between East and West leads to a series of productive collapses where finally the opposition is no longer viable. In Eisenstein's writings, the difference between objects and signs also breaks down to an extent. Ultimately, the various registers of the sign begin to blur together and pictorial and verbal aspects converge in the graphic. When reading these texts closely it becomes increasingly difficult to tell where meaning lies: in signs, pictures, or objects; in the relations among them when they are combined or arranged in particular ways; or in their contexts of reception.

At this point I would like to return to questions of psychoanalytic theory, in particular to the notion of the Laplanchean enigmatic signification with which I began this chapter. This fact of human interaction—that we can never know beyond a doubt whether we have understood what another person intends to signify to us—is thrown into relief when we trace its effects through texts that attempt to make sense of broad, blanket paradigms of cultural difference. Texts that are organized around such monolithic binary oppositions as the difference between East and West or Orient and Occident can rarely sustain those oppositions. As the artist Steve McQueen's installation helps us to understand, something else emerges through that opposition: a subject trying to communicate something to an other, and a subject trying to understand what an other is communicating to her. As Laplanche helpfully explains, there are several advantages to thinking of these others as concrete individuals who cannot help but transmit

The Great Wall of China.
(H. Edward Kim/National Geographic Stock)

enigmatic messages to us from the moment of our birth—messages that then remain permanently lodged as enigmatic fragments within our psyches. When conceptualized in these terms, the problems of racial, ethnic, and other forms of difference are recast as problems stemming from the effects of internal alterity. But the solution to these problems is far from simple. To undo the internal alterity of the enigmatic signifier, Laplanche suggests, is to undo the self: it cannot be removed as if one were performing a surgery. If I have suggested that a small but highly charged fragment of Eastern difference lies present within Eisenstein's film theory, it is not in order to discredit that theory or to suggest that the fragment should be excised. Removing the hieroglyph from Eisenstein's writings would alter them in qualitative ways. Rather, my aim is simply to acknowledge one of the many internal alterities within cinema culture. While the paradox of internal difference cannot, by definition, ever be fully resolved, one can certainly begin to think productively about its remarkable effects and attempt to trace its complicated and occasionally surprising vicissitudes. This project begins with the acknowledgment of the presence of those internal alterities, both within the psyche and within cultures.

Laplanche's theory of enigmatic signification also contains a reminder that communication is always context- and audience-dependent, and that a sign's meaning shifts depending on its mode of address. This statement applies dramatically to a slide in *Once upon a Time* depicting the Great Wall of China, the image with which I conclude this chapter. Michelangelo Antonioni's documentary film *Chung Kuo: Cina* (1972), which I discuss in chapter 4, also features images of this monument. Filmed just at the time that Communist China was beginning to open its doors to foreign visitors and their cameras, Antonioni's documentary projects this image forth as a symbol of the new, revolutionary China for people around the world, many of whom were viewing contemporary images of that country for the very first time. The Great Wall's snaking line across the landscape asserts a continuity between old and new, while at the same time serving as a reminder of the necessity, both military and metaphorical, to demarcate the boundaries between self and other. Five years later, in the *Voyager II* image capsule assembled by NASA and SETI, the image of the Great Wall takes on a new meaning. No longer the emblem of a single country—and an enigmatic, closed one at that—the wall was in this case included as one of many signifiers representing the collective inhabitants of planet earth. In this new context, what was once an image of an enemy nation becomes a sign of human subjects in general, crafted and curated by a United States government agency. The myth that the Great Wall is so large as to be visible from outer space is telling when considered in the context of the visual time capsule of the Golden Record. This myth speaks to a desire to put humanity's grandest collective achievements on display to an imagined extraterrestrial audience in order to send a message of strength or pride, or simply as a declaration of existence.[67] In 2002, in the context of McQueen's *Once upon a Time*, the Great Wall appears in yet another way: as an almost quaint reminder of a time, once upon a time, when communication with those whom one assumed to be radically other seemed vital, possible, and safe.

He watched it as though it were a thing that could fascinate and make afraid, as though it held something that he longed for and yet almost loathed . . . It was a small Chinese box of black and gold-dust lacquer.

—OSCAR WILDE, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

2 THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

In 1925, the actress Anna May Wong kicked off the construction of Grauman's Chinese Theater in a ceremonial event staged as a photo opportunity. This vignette about the theater's history competes for room in Hollywood's long caravan of legends with an array of lively anecdotes about the genesis of the theater's forecourt. The collection of star signatures, handprints, and footprints housed in that forecourt has given rise to many well-known, if largely apocryphal, stories of origin that circulate around Grauman's theater. One version of the tale states that the actress Norma Talmadge accidentally put the first footprint in wet cement; in other accounts the idea came from Mary Pickford, the architects, or Grauman himself.[1] Stacey Endres and Robert Cushman list ten variations on the story, including one in which Pickford reportedly got the idea when her dog Zorro ran across wet concrete outside her home.[2] The story of the forecourt, which continues to be one of Hollywood's premier tourist attractions, could metaphorically be said to upstage the story of Anna May Wong driving her inaugural rivet. Wong is credited with this role only in Stephen Silverman's account; Endres and Cushman say that she assisted Norma Talmadge, and Terry Helgesen does not mention Wong.[3]

Like Keye Luke, the Asian American artist who painted the murals inside Grauman's theater, Anna May Wong takes second stage to signatures that are more famous. The imprints in the theater's forecourt symbolically assuage with familiar markers of authorship and property any anxiety that might arise from its foreignness: the enigmatic sig-

nifier of the Chinese Theater is counteracted with clear, concrete signs of Western ownership. These markers are stamped in place of the absent signatures of Wong, the building's inaugurator, and Luke, one of the principal creators of both the theater's interior design and the publicity materials that drew audiences to it.[4] As Michael Rogin aptly summarizes, "Hollywood orientalism could bring once-forbidden pleasures to movie audiences as long as actual Asian Americans were kept out."[5] Still, if the Chinese Theater masks the underrepresentation of actual Asian Americans in Hollywood film, one might say that it also openly flaunts its appropriation of the fantasy version of the Orient. If real Asian Americans were underrepresented in the classical Hollywood era, it is also true that the simulacral Orient that some of them helped to create was proudly on display. If Asian Americans have been marginalized in Hollywood cinema, that is to say, this marginalization seems at least in part to represent a response to the centrality of the East as a topic of fantasy representation and concern.

The role of the Orient in the Hollywood imaginary is further evidenced in the grand-scale prologues that guests were treated to as part of their evening's entertainment during the first ten years in the life of Grauman's Chinese Theater. These prologues, which one reporter dubbed "super-spectacles," were vaudeville-style live performances produced by Sid Grauman.[6] They featured hundreds of extras and elaborate sets and costumes. The prologues were most often thematically related to whatever film was playing at the time; however, some departed from this model to showcase unusual novelty acts that sometimes smacked of Far Eastern flavor. Fatimah Tobing Rony notes that during the early 1930s many films shown in the bigger movie palaces were accompanied by acts that were labeled "exotic," such as those featuring Siamese twins or fortunetellers like Gin Chow, the Chinese philosopher and prophet.[7] In 1933, showings of *King Kong* at the Chinese Theater were preceded by a production number set in a jungle. A program for that prologue lists performances by "African Choral Ensembles" and the African American "Chorus of Dusky Maidens."[8] Like the murals in the theater's lobby, this program was designed by Keye Luke.

Grauman's prologue to *Rain*—Lewis Milestone's South Seas missionary drama from 1932, based on the story by W. Somerset Maugham—could certainly be described as an exotic Asian super-spectacle. For the prologue, a set was constructed replicating Grant Street in San

Grauman's signature, with hand and foot prints.
(Photograph by the author)

Francisco's Chinatown. A dance act by the acrobatic and adagio team of Lafayette and Laverne climaxed with Lafayette slinging Laverne by her long hair through what appeared to be a large plate-glass window. A troupe of extras costumed as police rushed to the scene, and the entire Chinatown set split in half to reveal a replica of the island hotel featured in the film. Palm trees descended, doubles of Joan Crawford and the rest of the cast stepped onto the terrace, and an artificial storm poured down from the rafters to create a live tableau that aimed, in the words of one writer, "to duplicate perfectly the set in the picture."[9]

The prologue for *Rain* creates a dizzying *mise-en-abyme*, one that also seems to extend outward to Grauman's Chinese Theater as a whole. The series of illusions offered up in the prologue form a set of "Chinese boxes": Grauman places a tropical Pacific island inside a San Francisco Chinatown inside a fantastical Chinese movie palace, all of which accompany a motion picture about a European and American colonial voyage to the South Pacific. As Helgesen notes, the Chinese Theater's architecture and interior design were based not on actual Chinese buildings but rather on the orientalist period of Chippendale.[10] East and West, local and global, flat picture and live action, original and simulacrum are enfolded within one another in a way that complicates attempts to distinguish among them: like the architecture

of the theater itself, the prologue is structured by layers sandwiching the cryptic and strange between sheets of familiar faces and imprints. The ambivalent, even fetishistic style of entertainment experience provided by the Chinese Theater seems to be predicated upon a disavowal —a structure of divided belief similar to the one that Christian Metz associates with cinema going in general. Credulous guests may imagine themselves lost in ancient imperial China, but they know all the while that the scenery is tricked.[11] The pleasure of the experience lies not in one of these mental states or the other, but rather in the constant oscillation between the two: between credulity and distrust, alienation and ease, feeling safely at home and feeling dazed in a foreign milieu.

DELICATE OBJECTS

I offer a continuation of the reading of Grauman's Chinese Theater that I began in this book's introduction as a way to transition back to visual analysis, specifically to interpretations of Hollywood's orientalist décor. An early example of this style of mise-en-scène can be found in D. W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms, or, The Yellow Man and the Girl* (1919), adapted from Thomas Burke's story "The Chink and the Child." Griffith's film centers on the triangular relations among the rage-filled prizefighter Battling Burrows (Donald Crisp), his submissive daughter Lucy (Lillian Gish), and the gentle Chinese shopkeeper Cheng Huan (Richard Barthelmess in yellowface). Like Evelyn Mulwray in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*, Lucy ventures into Chinatown —in this case, in London—to seek sanctuary from an abusive and controlling father. As in *Chinatown*, the denouement involves the tragic death of the daughter. The police investigation is half hearted, and the film offers the suggestion that it is impossible to enforce the law in the ethnic ghetto: an officer remarks, for example, "Good week —only 40,000 casualties." Cheng Huan, in a reversal of the historical colonial movement, has come to London to civilize the barbaric Westerners with the teachings of Buddha. As an intertitle states, "The Yellow Man holds a great dream to take the glorious message of peace to the barbarous Anglo-Saxons, sons of turmoil and strife." The relationship between Cheng and Lucy is tender and intimate, with the strong implication of an erotic connection.[12] The film's universalizing, humanist message of peace was reportedly a response on Griffith's part to the charges of racism regarding *Birth of a Nation*.

A structuralist reading of the film's narrative patterns might call attention to the way its plot rewrites racial history through the power of projection. It is China, not Britain, the film suggests, that sends colonial representatives around the globe. The peace-loving Cheng Huan, not the fighter Battling Burrows, is the film's below-the-line aggressor. One might also point out that *Broken Blossoms* trades in the affective powers of melodrama through its deployment of the figure of the helpless white woman. Initially, Cheng is Lucy's savior and companion, but the film cannot handle this pairing and the threat of miscegenation it raises and so she must die. There is another way to think about the notion of projection—namely as it pertains to the film's imagery, in particular its mise-en-scène. The orientalist décor that adorns Cheng's apartment, his curio shop, and the opium den that he frequents reveals a great deal about the film's vision and politics vis-à-vis the East. These settings and objects, and their visual aesthetics, are also connected to the oriental alterity that I suggest is to be found here and there in cinematic culture more broadly, for example in the architecture and interior design of Grauman's Chinese Theater and in the metaphor of the Japanese pictogram in Eisenstein's theory of film.

The art direction of *Broken Blossoms* reads ambiguously, and it offers a different sort of puzzle than do the film's characters and plot structure. At times, the décor evokes iniquity and sin. A scene in an opium den features incense, hookahs, and exotic musical instruments to signal the way that various ethnicities mingle together in this space. On other occasions, the Eastern elements of mise-en-scène in the film suggest a compassionate luxury. Cheng swathes the battered Lucy in silk embroidered gowns and surrounds her with exotic flowers. The sentimental communion that Cheng and Lucy share through their mutual appreciation of "delicate objects," in the words of an intertitle, is countered by the suggestion that such goods are impure material temptations ("In this scarlet house of sin," an intertitle wonders, "does he ever hear the temple bells?"). A scene in which Battling Burrows discovers Lucy at Cheng's flat and smashes all the objects there and in his store likewise reads ambivalently, as both a tragic act of destruction and a punishment for Cheng's seduction of Lucy with sensual objects.[13]

Broken Blossoms provides one of the earliest examples of an orientalist trope that I call "the Shanghai gesture." This cinematic trope involves a movement whereby seemingly marginal Asian set dressing in Holly-

wood film ends up functioning as a load-bearing narrative element. A number of films in the noir genre visually and acoustically reference the East in this manner, with Asian stylistic touches large and small. Porcelain bric-a-brac graces opening scenes of *Laura* (Preminger, 1944); the neo-noir *Jade* (Friedkin, 1995) features bizarre décor and a mysterious engraved Chinese box. Other examples of film noir that employ orientalist décor or settings in this manner include *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk, 1944; based on Raymond Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*); *Impact* (Lubin, 1949), wherein, as in both *Chinatown* and *The Lady from Shanghai*, Asian servants are the bearers of secrets; *Sunset Boulevard* (Wilder, 1950), which also associates Asiatic exotic décor with the mania of the femme fatale; *D.O.A.* (Maté, 1950); and *House of Bamboo* (Fuller, 1955). There are also neo-noir and noir-inspired films that evoke Asiatic themes or settings in more self-conscious and critical ways, such as *Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974), which I discuss in chapter 3, as well as *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* (Cassavetes, 1976) and *Chan Is Missing* (Wang, 1982). James Naremore dedicates a few useful but brief pages of his book *More than Night* to orientalist themes and stereotypes in film noir, and he states that "the Asian theme can in fact be traced back to Dashiell Hammett's earliest hard-boiled stories for *Black Mask*, which are saturated with a low brow Orientalism reminiscent of the Yellow Peril years before and after World War I."[14] In such films Chinese costumes and figurines sometimes appear at random or for what at first glance seem to be purely stylistic purposes. The East's presence seems gratuitous—an afterthought tacked on for no other reason than to provide visual atmosphere and aesthetic pleasure, or to conjure a vaguely paranoiac mood for a Western film market. In some of these films, however, décor becomes entangled with the film's larger meanings. Elements of mise-en-scène become overdetermined, and ultimately they bear the burden of explanation for a multitude of cryptic enigmas that the narrative cannot resolve.

One might compare this process to that described by Thomas Elsaesser in "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama." In writing about widescreen color melodramas of the mid-twentieth century, especially those of Douglas Sirk, Elsaesser posits a formula for the peculiarly motivated relationship between décor and subjectivity in that Hollywood genre. "The more the setting fills with objects to which the plot gives symbolic significance," Elsaesser writes, "the more the characters are enclosed in seemingly

ineluctable situations." These objects do not simply reflect or symbolize the characters' incapacity and paralysis; they actually seem to abet it, precede it, or cause it. Elsaesser suggests that elements of art direction appear to take over the characters, finally becoming "more real than the human relations or emotions they were intended to symbolize."[15] Like the Marxian fetish that absorbs the value of human labor and human relations into itself, these cinematic objects speak more eloquently than their emotionally stunted owners. They represent a specific form of repressed desire that has been rendered unconscious and inexpressible due to an oppressive sociopolitical culture, such as that of the 1950s suburban United States in which many of Sirk's films are set. Elsaesser refers to the hysterical quality of this phenomenon whereby physical objects, like the body of the hysteric, speak what the subject cannot utter. Freud calls this hysterical "conversion," a situation in which "psychical excitation" is transformed into "somatic symptoms."[16] In *All That Heaven Allows* (Sirk, 1955) the deceased father's impassive trophy, the thin-skinned Wedgwood teapot perpetually on the verge of breaking, and the lonely television set are infused with a pathos that the characters themselves are unable to articulate except in the most pedestrian language. These objects are more than emotional emblems or markers—more, even, than anthropomorphizations. In an almost mystical conversion, they seem to substitute fully for human affective expression, as if this job had been subcontracted to them.

What I am calling the "Shanghai gesture" operates according to a similar logic, with several key differences. Whereas melodrama is concerned with the circulation of affect, film noir is concerned with the circulation of knowledge. The challenge facing the noir protagonist is more epistemological than affective. The most interesting film noir detectives and investigative questers end up stymied by some especially perplexing riddle; like the most interesting melodrama characters, they fail to some extent. The melodramatic object becomes a ventriloquist for the character, speaking in his or her place and expressing the affect of which he or she is unaware. The film noir objects to which I am referring take over for the protagonist in a different way: they seem to know the answer to a puzzle, to contain the secret to a mystery with which he grapples, to index the identity of a criminal, or, in some cases, to provide the key to an enigma within the protagonist's own subjectivity.

These objects belong to a different category than the quest ob-

jects that frequently populate certain forms of film noir: those coveted golden challises, impossible and deadly objects of desire, like the "great whatsit" of *Kiss Me Deadly* (Aldrich, 1955). The two categories may overlap, as in the case of *The Maltese Falcon* (Huston, 1941) where the mystery behind the falcon's deadliness and curse-like quality is associated with its exotic provenance.[17] Neither are the objects I speak of precisely like Hitchcock's MacGuffins—that is, items or bits of information that serve as pretexts for the plot and that are "of vital importance for the characters," but otherwise are somewhat arbitrary.[18] However, there may be overlap, as in *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959), where the MacGuffin is an exotic-looking statuette—pre-Columbian in style, but clearly meant to convey racialized otherness—containing government secrets on microfilm (the "pumpkin," as Cary Grant's character calls it). The contents of the microfilm are incidental; we need not know or care precisely what information is encoded there. The form in which these secrets are enclosed, an exotic figurine, purports to be equally arbitrary. It does not matter to the plot whether the microfilm is hidden in a Thai statue or a French wine bottle. The savvy viewer understands that the MacGuffin is insignificant, and that to obsess about its particular shape and form is to fail to understand its status as placeholder. In some cases, however, an analysis of these objects' formal properties does yield additional meaning.

In my analysis, the Shanghai gesture involves a double abduction: an appropriation of superficial, even kitsch elements of oriental aesthetic by Hollywood, and a trope in which that aesthetic comes to invade and take over the logic of the film. In choosing this phrase to describe the trope, I mean my reader to hear an echo of the verb "to shanghai." According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term originated in 1871 as colloquialism meaning "to drug or otherwise render insensible, and ship on board a vessel wanting hands," and more generally, "to transfer forcibly or abduct, to constrain or compel." The notion of being "rendered insensible" speaks to fears about a loss of the capacity for rational thought and free will in the face of a confrontation with the East. The film noir protagonist is likewise threatened with a loss of cognitive faculties when he happens upon one of these knowing orientalist objects. In addition, the term "to shanghai" indicates a sense of movement away or transfer, implying a kind of topographical extension, change of coordinates, or disorientation.

Cinematic elements that have been "shanghaied" in this way be-

come enigmatic signifiers. They activate the structures of desire that Jean Laplanche associates with this mode of signification by soliciting curiosity and a desire to know. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit go so far as to suggest that desire in general might be underwritten by a drive to interpret and understand: "However peculiar it may seem to speak of desire as an epistemological category, we propose that desire as lack is constituted, originally, as the exciting pain or a certain ignorance: the failure to penetrate the *sense* of the other's soliciting."[19] Bersani describes how this state of not knowing can be oddly infuriating and pleasurable at the same time by eliciting "a pleasure in the very pain of being disoriented."[20] What makes the orientalist objects I will be speaking about in this chapter so infuriating, pleasurable, and endlessly intriguing to both film noir's characters and its spectators is their whiff of unintelligibility, which is nicely captured in the word "curio." The desire to possess these objects is bound up with the desire to penetrate their sense and to know their secrets.

THE EMPTY CAMERA *The Big Sleep*

A few examples of the Shanghai gesture are to be found in *The Maltese Falcon*. In the film's final scene, the questers hold their collective breath as the black bird, taken from the Hong Kong ship *La Paloma*, is unwrapped. They tear away endless layers of newspaper to reveal its shiny black ebony, but when they scrape it away they discover that it is only a layer of paint. The dingus is a fake, and its concealing veneers only hide further riddles. Before this disappointment, *The Maltese Falcon* features a scene in which Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) casually inspects a hat belonging to the femme fatale Brigid O'Shaughnessy (Mary Astor). A close-up reveals the label "Queens Road, Hong Kong." A brief motif of suspicious music plays: the hat reveals that O'Shaughnessy has spent time in Asia, and that she has likely lied to Spade. "Hong Kong" and "lying" are now associated with one another. In another scene, Spade searches an unconscious Joel Cairo (Peter Lorre). He finds some coins with holes in their centers that look to be of Hong Kong origin, along with a handful of passports, a ticket to the symphony, and a gardenia-scented handkerchief. The film gives curious emphasis to these objects, especially the handkerchief, Spade's discovery of which is punctuated with an orchestral flourish. Like *Broken Blossoms*, *The Maltese Falcon* raises doubts about objects

Centerless coins: Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*.
(Warner Home Video)

that come from the East. Quizzical woodwind notes hover around the peculiar hat and centerless coin. The objects serve to cast distrust on their owners and to raise the suspicion of deceit. This suspicion becomes entangled with the objects' places of origin; it seems almost to emanate from Hong Kong rather than from Brigid O'Shaughnessy or Joel Cairo. In the film noir universe of *The Maltese Falcon*, a hat and coin from across the Pacific are more dangerous, damning, and revelatory than a loaded gun, as is a gardenia-scented handkerchief, a point that I will take up soon.

Eric Lott in his essay "The Whiteness of Film Noir" describes a scene from *Murder, My Sweet*. In this scene, a client attempts to give the detective Philip Marlowe a jade necklace that he has recovered for her, whereupon Marlowe remarks, "No thanks, it's wrong for my complexion." In analyzing this scene Lott observes that "we are given to understand 'complexion' first and foremost in the moral sense; Marlowe has bested the forces of greed and graft that threaten to swamp him . . . In another and equally pressing sense, though, Marlowe has remained true to a racial physiognomy, that of whiteness, which indexes his pristine soul."[21] The jade necklace in *Murder, My Sweet*—like the black

bird in *The Maltese Falcon*—is a dangerous object, something that must be rejected or even destroyed if whiteness and Western rationalism are to be reaffirmed. Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo also comment on the significance of the jade necklace in this film, and they suggest that it represents a threat not only against whiteness but also against patriarchy: "While the rulers of the East know the proper value . . . of jade, which they revere, this indeterminate jewel is a threat to the West. Within this orientalist paradigm, the East represents a maternal/natural figure in relation to the West's paternal civilizing influence."[22] The style of critical race reading that Lott and Oliver and Trigo here employ is equally revelatory when extended to other films in this cycle, one of which, Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946), is also a noir adaptation of a Raymond Chandler hardboiled detective novel.

The Big Sleep relies heavily upon orientalist elements of mise-en-scène. In this film, Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) has been hired by General Guy Sternwood (Charles Waldron) to investigate a blackmail case involving his daughter Carmen (Martha Vickers). While on a stakeout outside the house of Arthur Gwynn Geiger on Laverne Terrace, Marlowe hears gunshots and a scream, and enters the house. The sequence is filmed with a mobile camera largely from Marlowe's point of view, and it is edited in a loose shot/reverse shot pattern. Marlowe enters through a window to find Geiger dead on the floor while Carmen Sternwood, "high as a kite" and wearing a silk Chinese dress decorated with metallic dragons, is posed in a carved Chinese armchair. The room contains a beaded curtain, a silk tapestry embroidered with Chinese calligraphy, and an oriental rug. Incense wafts from a bronze bowl mounted on a wall. One object dominates several shots: a chipped, wooden Buddha head that looks to be of Thai origin. Marlowe flips it open to reveal a camera inside and finds that the film is missing. Marlowe then searches Geiger's desk, where he finds a little black book filled with names, including the Sternwood name, along with notes written in code. In the 1946 theatrical-release version of the film, a dissolve connects the previous footage directly to Marlowe's discovery of the codebook. In the prerelease 1945 version, a lengthier investigation sequence precedes this discovery.

Aside from a few key details, both cuts of the film visually transcribe the descriptions of Geiger's house in Chandler's 1939 novel. In first-person narration Marlowe describes "brown plaster walls decked out

The house on Laverne Terrace: Martha Vickers in *The Big Sleep*. (Warner Home Video)

with Chinese strips of embroidery," "Chinese and Japanese prints in grained wood frames," lamps with "jade-green shades and long tassels," and "a thick pinkish Chinese rug in which a gopher could have spent a week without showing his nose above the nap."[23] This snappy Chandlerian prose is rich with metaphorical associations, linking oriental opulence with hiding and getting lost. While the film reproduces many of these descriptive details, it also contains some significant differences. Unlike Chandler's Carmen, who is nude except for "a pair of long jade earrings," Hawks's Carmen is clothed. Another difference concerns the Thai statue. Chandler's original account describes it as "a thing that looked like a totem pole. It had a profile like an eagle and its wide round eye was a camera lens."[24] Chandler's totem pole calls to mind a Native American past and its corresponding spiritual traditions. Hawks's Eastern Buddhist sculpture invokes a different set of otherworldly associations, one of which is a sense of inscrutability. Interestingly, the two details that have been altered from the novel, Carmen's attire and the statue that houses the camera, are both orientalized in the film. Like one who has reached a spiritual nirvana, the wooden Buddha's head is empty, posing the riddle of a camera with-

out pictures, eyes closed and smiling at something secret. It differs in this sense from Chandler's totem pole with its wide-open eye. Editing, framing, and even Carmen's name associate her with the filmless camera; she is likewise cloaked in an oriental exterior that contains nothing. Taciturn and grinning, she is intoxicated to the point that she is unable to say what happened or who killed Geiger. When Marlowe aggressively questions her, she only slurs, "You talk too much, yuk yuk yuk." She has been shanghaied: drugged, rendered insensible, and made foreign. She is also an enigmatic signifier, decadently clothed but offering up no meaning.

Later in the film, Marlowe shoots the statuette, blasting it open. He does so in order to fool Eddie Mars's henchmen who are waiting outside Geiger's house, ready to enter in the event that shots are fired. Marlowe, however, has already anticipated their actions. His tricky destruction of the sculpture symbolizes the double triumph of hard-boiled cunning and brute, ballistic force over the irrational enigmas of the East. Like the scene in which Battling Burrows smashes the oriental objects in Cheng's apartment, this scene mobilizes the resources of the white, Western man of action against oriental mise-en-scène. As in that scene, the victory is somewhat pyrrhic. Marlowe may have temporarily secured the upper hand, but the film's central mysteries remain far from resolved.

This scene from *The Big Sleep* links the Orient to both the feminine and the erotic. It also links it to the unknown: to the limits of deductive reasoning and rational inquiry. The association is further cemented when Marlowe discovers Geiger's codebook, which is related to the ciphers of the empty camera and to Carmen. Chandler's novel also connects the codebook to the feminine, the erotic, and the unknown, as is apparent in a passage in which Marlowe describes Geiger's bedroom: "It was neat, fussy, womanish. The bed had a flounced cover. There was perfume on the triple-mirrored dressing table, beside a handkerchief, some loose money, a man's brushes, a keyholder . . . I took the keyholder back to the living room and went through the desk. There was a locked steel box in the top drawer. I used one of the keys on it. There was a lot of writing in code, in the same slanting printing that had written to General Sternwood."[25] Marlowe uses feminine adjectives to describe Geiger's bedroom: "fussy," "womanish," and "flounced." Like Joel Cairo in *The Maltese Falcon* with his gardenia-scented handkerchief, there is something queer about Geiger. The

scene in Geiger's bedroom was cut from the 1946 theatrical release of the film, but the 1945 prerelease version shows that the filmmakers retained these connotations from the novel, as Marlowe examines the contents of the dressing table with its tasseled Chinese wall hangings and effeminate, kitschy accessories. Marlowe sniffs the perfumed handkerchief, and smiles knowingly.

The slanting writing that Marlowe finds in the codebook when he opens this box with Geiger's key is an enigmatic signifier that points to skewed motives and twisted desires, thereby evoking and fusing the stereotypes of the "bent" homosexual and the "slant-eyed" Asian (earlier the bookshop clerk played by Dorothy Malone describes Geiger as having "a Charlie Chan moustache"). The mirrored dressing table points both to a stereotypically narcissistic femininity and to a notion of glassy, deceptive signs. The next scenes in both the novel and the film depict Marlowe at home, sleeplessly trying to crack the cipher in Geiger's book. However, the key is already there, in the design of the dresser that housed it and in the very slant of the handwriting, which themselves become the markers of guilt, awryness, and perversion. The handwriting functions as an index: the clue is not to be found in the translated content but is rather hiding in plain view, in the style of the print. Chandler's repetition of the words "key" and "keyholder" in this passage provide a clue that the code is less intractable than it seems.

One could argue that these swinging tapestries, perfumed Chinese interiors, and slanted words are but marginal elements of set dressing in both the film and the novel of *The Big Sleep*; if so, there would be little to say aside from a brief critique of the orientalist impulse revealed therein. I suggest, though, that these elements of mise-en-scène are more than exotic theme-decorations. The viewer and Marlowe both enter Geiger's orientalist house at a pivotal moment: it is there that Marlowe comes to realize that he is involved in a much more tangled web of intrigue than General Sternwood's initial story about a gambling debt would suggest. Geiger's house is a miniature Chinatown, an oriental funhouse of riddles that, one by one, pop up to test Marlowe's interpretive skills. The oriental and queer objects in the mise-en-scène are precisely what indicate the underlying presence of further secrets. It is as much through mise-en-scène as through plot that we come to expect a more complex story than was originally made known both to Marlowe and to the spectator.

Marlowe finds the camera: Humphrey Bogart in *The Big Sleep.* (Warner Home Video)

Geiger's bedroom: Humphrey Bogart in the 1945 prerelease version of *The Big Sleep.* (Warner Home Video)

What are these deeper enigmas, and why are orientalist signifiers so often deployed to represent them—or even offered up as the explanation for them? *The Big Sleep*'s plot is notoriously convoluted, and many of the questions it poses are left unanswered. Chandler reportedly said that he himself was not sure who killed the Sternwood's chauffeur Owen in the end.[26] The tale may be apocryphal. Regardless, it suggests that *The Big Sleep* is more than a mystery story. It is an allegory of the problem of unsolved mysteries, the kind that cannot be answered simply by pinning a doer to a deed—enigmas, in other words, not riddles. What do these enigmas look like, and where do they come from? In most film noirs, as scholars have described, they appear in the form of a grail-like quest object or as an inscrutable femme fatale. However, some emblematic examples of the genre substitute an Asian figurine for the briefcase, or provide the femme fatale with a Chinese back story. Such films project the East as the site where informative communication and rational thought reach a limit, and that limit point sometimes takes the form of an Asian object or signifier, be it silken or ornamental, slanted or accented. The scene of the crime is peppered with oriental curios that taunt both detective and viewer with the question of their own significance.

A SHOW FOR THE TOURISTS *The Shanghai Gesture*

Curious objects of indeterminate significance are easy to spot in the oeuvre of Josef von Sternberg. In *Underworld* (1927), a feather clipped from a gangster moll's boa appears frequently in close-up. It initially serves as an erotic keepsake, but after making the rounds of several owners it becomes proof of one character's infidelity. Amy Jolly's bracelet in *Morocco* (1930) undergoes a similar transformation: when its beads scatter it becomes a symbol for Amy's failure to follow her true love. In *Macao* (1952), Nick Cochrane carries a two dollar bill inscribed with his fellow soldiers' signatures all the way through the war. The femme fatale Julie steals this bill and immediately uses it to tip a rickshaw driver. When the bill later falls back into Nick's hands, it will signify in yet another way: namely, as evidence that Julie was indeed the one who stole his wallet. Similar small objects populate the other films: the postcards bearing Lola Lola's image in *The Blue Angel* (1930), the religious icon tossed in the snow in *The Scarlet Empress* (1934).

In *The Shanghai Gesture* (1942)—a film that is rightfully overshad-

owed by those that Sternberg made with Marlene Dietrich in the 1930s, but interesting nonetheless—Sternberg continues to explore the instability of the value and meaning of material objects. Like many of his films, it is set in a fantastical Asian locale that is an imaginary version of Shanghai. *The Shanghai Gesture* begins with a title screen that provides an immediate clue that the film will be in some way about cross-cultural communication, and about what is lost in translation. The title card, accompanied by a foreboding orchestral arrangement, declares that the Shanghai of the film is "a modern Tower of Babel . . . [with] people living between the lines of law and custom." After a short introductory sequence, the opening credits give way to an elaborate crane shot that moves down through a circular, tiered casino run by Mother Gin Sling (Ona Munson); in the fanciful universe of the film, she represents the dragon lady warlord of the Shanghai fringes of society. The film introduces a collection of stock characters—a Brooklyn chorus girl named Dixie, the polygamous Mr. Howe, the "Persian poet" Omar, a Russian bartender, and Poppy (Gene Tierney), a young woman who has just arrived in Shanghai and whose true identity remains a mystery. Soon, a commissioner pays a visit to Mother Gin Sling to inform her that her establishment will be shut down before the Chinese New Year if she does not vacate the international sector of Shanghai and relocate to the China Cities (the Inter-China Trading Company has bribed the government into passing an anti-gambling ordinance). Meanwhile, Poppy immerses herself in the casino culture, and with Omar's encouragement she gradually gambles away a sum of twenty thousand pounds.

Mother Gin Sling soon discovers that Poppy is the daughter of Sir Guy Charteris (Walter Huston), the wealthy owner of the Inter-China Trading Company, who also seduced her years ago and robbed her of her dowry. She hatches an elaborate plan to save her establishment and take revenge on Sir Guy by throwing a Chinese New Year's dinner party where "debts will be paid." Granting Poppy unlimited credit, she lets her sow the seeds of her own destruction at the roulette wheel; Omar in turn encourages her to sell a necklace that was a gift from her father. Sir Guy soon discovers that his daughter has overdrawn her bank account, and he contrives to send her to Singapore. However, Poppy sneaks off the plane and shows up in time to make a drunken spectacle of herself at Mother Gin Sling's banquet. Sir Guy reluctantly attends this party, only to find his daughter fully in-

The casino: *The Shanghai Gesture.* (Image Entertainment)

toxicated and fully in debt to Mother Gin Sling. After assessing the situation he concedes to Gin Sling's demands by granting the casino permission to continue its operations in the international sector. However, Sir Guy also has a surprise in store for Mother Gin Sling: Poppy is her own biological daughter, a daughter that she had presumed dead. The film's fantastical resolution to these rapid turns of events shows Mother Gin Sling attempting to discipline the unruly Poppy, finally shooting her dead amid the noise of firecrackers and screams from the New Year's parade outdoors.

Gaylyn Studlar in her book *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic* suggests that Sternberg's oeuvre is characterized by an insistence on the iconic dimensions of the cinematic sign. Contrary to notions of the cinema's fundamental indexicality—its claim to a material, motivated link with its pro-filmic objects—Sternberg's films emphasize their images' pictorial resemblance to objects in the world. Unlike in Eisenstein's account of the pictogram, however, where the depiction of objects via resemblance implies a kind of materialism and link to the external world, Sternberg's iconic signifiers, Studlar suggests, do not posit or presume an ontological connection to their referents. Studlar writes, "The dominance of iconic

representation in von Sternberg's films becomes the representational equivalent to the disavowal that underscores the films' psychodynamics. The iconic sign is capable of holding its absent referent in an 'I-know-but-nevertheless' suspension . . . Iconic textuality locks the absent referent, whose indexical trace is left on the screen, into a dialectical, disavowing relationship with the sign as an imaginative creation . . . Von Sternberg's iconic style involves an ambiguous disavowal of cinematic representation's indexical aspect."[27] In Studlar's analysis, Sternberg reverses the film spectator's classic disavowal as described by Christian Metz. In Metz's model, the spectator knows the film to be but a two-dimensional picture, but disavows this knowledge and attributes reality to the image.[28] Sternberg, however, encourages us to do the opposite: we know his films have documented a real pro-filmic event, but we are told to accept them as pure simulation. One effect of this insistence on iconicity is to undo the usual conflation of orientalist fantasy with East Asian reality. Sternberg informs his spectators outright in the opening titles to *The Shanghai Gesture* that the Shanghai of his movie is a fictive place that "has nothing to do with the present." The film's anti-illusionist aesthetic is likewise consistent with such a reading. Another effect has to do with the film's participation in what Studlar calls a "masochistic aesthetic": an alternate world or heterocosm characterized by the removal of the Lacanian phallus as guarantor or standard of meaning and signification. This removal, in Studlar's account, is roughly analogous to the decentering of the cinematic index, which functions as a guarantor of its images' fixed link to reality. The result is a world in which the signifier floats freely, detached from its usual rubrics of meaning and unanchored from the burden of a one-for-one correspondence with objects in the world.

The Shanghai Gesture tends to emphasize the duplicity and falseness of the image. When Poppy decides to sell the diamond necklace given to her as a present from her father, Omar remarks that "this sparkle is artificial; you don't need it." Dixie in turn squanders a small fortune given to her by Sir Guy by investing it in a ruby that turns out to be phony. Almost all of the main characters go by pseudonyms: Poppy's real name is Victoria Charteris; Omar the "Persian poet" is actually neither. At the dinner party the guests' places at table are marked not with place cards but rather with small Chinese porcelain figurines made in their images. Some confusion arises during the process of sorting out which figurine belongs to which guest, especially since one

of them has been decapitated. This scene reveals that *The Shanghai Gesture* is concerned not only with the possibility of a false identification of an individual or object but, moreover, with the possibilities for deception that arise in a world saturated with iconic, imagistic signs as opposed to both written ones and ones based upon a physical link to their referents.

Sternberg's film is preoccupied not only with the possibility of deception but also with economies involving the wayward inflation and deflation of values or, in Studlar's sense, the masochistic free play of meanings. It associates these rapid value shifts explicitly with the Far East. As a note on one version of the script indicates, "The currency used in Shanghai is a distorted mirror of the confusing, ever-changing monetary values with which the earth counts its material wealth. Everything goes from buttons to lumps of metal, from copper cash to shoe silver."[29] In this world there is no economic standard in place to curb this instability, just as there is no standard index of meaning to ensure that signs remain soldered to their referents. The mise-en-scène of *The Shanghai Gesture* is filled with suspended objects that move up and down and thus form visual metaphors for the wild fluctuation of values in this world. Several scenes within the casino feature a basket on a pulley system that serves as a mechanism for the secure transfer of cash and pawned items up to the administrative offices on the top floor. The objects placed in this basket—diamond necklaces, pearls, guns—have been sold for a song by their owners in exchange for more chips or to pay off debts. Later in the film, young women appear suspended in cages above the streets of Shanghai during a New Year's pageant, and the cages resemble the basket and pulley system. This is an image to which I will return shortly.

Many aspects of the story of *The Shanghai Gesture*'s long and arduous journey to the screen seem to mirror some of the chaotic fluctuations of value and meaning with which the film is concerned. Many of the Hollywood studios sought the property, originally a Broadway play by John Colton, who had also adapted W. Somerset Maugham's short story "Rain" for the theater. Paramount made the first inquiries in 1926, which were followed by United Artists in 1929, Carl Laemmle Jr. for Universal in 1929, Columbia and Tiffany in 1930, and RKO, Mascot Productions, and Warner Brothers in 1932. Records indicate that Will H. Hays and Colonel Jason S. Joy of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America corresponded at length with

Laemmle, beginning in October of 1929. Joy wrote to Hays to apprise him of the impending "delicate situation" with the play, which was sure to be in violation of the Production Code: "Junior said his company is pretty much in the 'red' and that they need a 'red-hot smash' to pull it out . . . However, I think he is about ready to be weaned away from the idea."[30] Two days later, Hays wrote to Junior Laemmle: "The play deals with a bawdy house which at times is unusually attractive and at other times wretchedly sordid. Into this background is woven miscegenation, illegitimacy, white slavery, murder and an opportunity to incur the ill-will of other countries. If the story were re-written so as to avoid all of these difficulties, as it would have to be, it is my honest opinion that it would be so emasculated as to thwart the purpose you have in mind."[31] The negotiations pertained to the perceived box office value of the racy film being deflated by the restrictions of the Production Code, which would essentially castrate it at the box office. Junior, for his part, refused to take no for an answer: records indicate that he was willing to "change the bawdy house into a gambling joint," but he was under the sway of the "personal and social influences" of playwright Colton.[32] He then agreed to shelve the project, but he soon broke this promise and renewed his request. Numerous changes were made to the treatment, in addition to the change from bordello to casino. "Mother Goddam" became "Mother Satan" (eventually, she would become Mother Gin Sling). Poppy's opium addiction survived only in the allusion of her name, and care was taken to avoid accusations of anti-Japanese propaganda, including changing the nationality of one character "who is described as Jap."[33]

Still, the property continued to be a hot commodity. Hays stated that there might have to be a lottery: "Companies would draw for the privilege the same as they did in getting 'Bad Girl.'"[34] *The Shanghai Gesture* had become the prize in a Hollywood-wide game of roulette. A peevish telegram from Harry Warner to Hays indicates that he had been ready to purchase the rights to the film, but declined because of Hays's objections and assurances that the picture was unfilmable under the current code restrictions—only to find a United Artists advertisement in the Hollywood Reporter announcing it as one of their upcoming productions. Hays hastily wrote back to Warner explaining that the ad had been a mistake; no one would be making the picture.[35] The project was tossed about like a hot potato, rich with the promise of box office but then gradually diminished by the ever-growing list

of rejections from the Production Code Administration. Eventually, with Sternberg's collaboration, Arnold Pressburger secured permission to make *The Shanghai Gesture.* Nevertheless, its fraught preproduction history continued to have effects upon the film.

The hullabaloo with the Hays office may have had a role to play in shaping the film's anti-illusionist aesthetic.[36] The story of one scene that almost failed to make the final cut is telling in this respect. Toward the end of the film, at the Chinese New Year's party where Poppy meets her demise, Mother Gin Sling opens the curtains of her dining room to reveal some entertainment staged outside in the streets: girls in wooden cages on ropes are being hoisted above a vast crowd as they are auctioned off to the highest bidder. She informs her astonished guests that the spectacle is not a real auction but rather only a show "staged purely for the tourists . . . Shanghai has to live up to its reputation." "Are you sure? They look awfully real," says a concerned guest. "Nevertheless, they're fake," she insists, "They're neither frightened nor innocent." If the spectacle's status as artificial and staged were not already apparent, Sternberg's camera lends emphasis to it by framing the scene with theatrical-looking windowpanes, and includes Mother Gin Sling's bodyguard as a spectator within the image. The scene is a relic from the play, which features women in cages at the brothel. A response to an earlier version of the treatment submitted by Colton in 1932 had indicated that at that time there were no longer "any signs of the caged women" in the treatment.[37] Yet this image does indeed appear in the final film. A letter to Arnold Pressburger from the Production Code Administration (PCA) sternly reminds the producer that "the girl[s] in the cage must, of course, not even be suggestively nude."[38] The image of the girls in the cages remains in the film, though, not as a representation of "actual" prostitution but as simulacrum. It is merely "a show for the tourists," an iconic sign inside the film's diegesis. Incredibly, this incident seems to open up the possibility that *any* act or image prohibited by the Production Code might have been represented on-screen as long as it were clearly labeled as spectacle, "fake," or "staged."

The most eloquent objection to the image of the caged girls came not from the Production Code offices but from T. K. Chang of the Consulate of the Republic of China (Taiwan), who cautioned the producers to take "consideration of Chinese sentiment" in their depictions. As to the "auction of girls," Chang stated, "there is no such

Caged girls: *The Shanghai Gesture.* (Image Entertainment)

practice" in Chinese culture. In this letter Chang also complained of the film's ending: "To slaughter a child at the very hand of her own mother . . . is hardly conceivable in good morals, whether it is Shanghai Gesture or Hollywood Gesture. Certainly it is inconceivable in the moral concept of the Chinese people."[39] Amazingly, Pressburger responded by reminding Chang of the film's status as fiction and as iconic signifier rather than index: "Please do not forget that our film 'Shanghai Gesture' is not meant to portray reality, but to display a world of fantasy. This imaginary world has no connection with the realistic aspects of today."[40] Chang, for his part, replied with the following statement:

> While it is true that a story of a picture is necessarily an imaginary fiction, such imaginations always prove to be constructed from the raw material of realities. In other words, in almost every story, there is always a certain local color, descriptive of certain definite people in a definite place . . . In actual Shanghai, gambling joints have never been operated by Chinese nationals much less by Chinese women—such as described in your picture. It is hoped that as a friend of China, you will be good enough to re-arrange your characters with this patent fact in mind . . . I have found that based on information obtained through

> their own sources, Chinese newspapers in San Francisco and the Chinese Screen Actors' Guild here [in Los Angeles] have voiced their disapproval.[41]

In a gesture of conciliation or goodwill Chang was invited to visit the set, which, as Pressburger described it, "along with our costumes and Chinese actors are designed to fully portray the finest aspects of Chinese dignity and art."[42] Chang met with members of the production team, including Sternberg, and continued to voice objections to major plot points and characters. However, it appears that none of the changes he requested were made — perhaps due to a lack of concern, or perhaps because the production was already too far along.

In some ways, *The Shanghai Gesture* might be said to perform a grand Shanghai gesture, one that takes place not within the film's diegesis but at the level of its production. It is as if property itself — from Colton's play to the treatment, the script, and the eventual film — were subject to a series of projections, anxieties, overvaluations, and deflations that were consistently, if obliquely, associated with its orientalness. Like the black bird in *The Maltese Falcon*, this "object" was overdetermined, a highly coveted property that was also taboo and potentially poisonous, and freighted with an enigmatic significance that demanded yet resisted interpretation. The key to deciphering the property was in fact to encode it: to cloak its forbidden erotics behind a shimmering wall of style. Each successful treatment of the material constituted an attempt to preserve its alchemical box office goodness (the sex, the drugs, the exoticism, and so on) while disguising it sufficiently to sneak past the censors. Other controversial projects of this era were rejected, resubmitted, and eventually approved by the PCA, yet *The Shanghai Gesture* was subject to an unusually long revision process. The language of Hays's initial response to Carl Laemmle Jr. is revealing: the story, as Hays put it, "deals with a bawdy house which at times is unusually attractive and at other times wretchedly sordid," and it is set against a background of racial ambiguity. The problem is not just the bawdy house, nor is it simply the film's exotic setting. Rather, the problem is that their meanings are ambivalent.

ELSA'S PHONE CALL *The Lady from Shanghai*

I conclude this chapter with a reading of Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), a final example of a classical film noir in which orientalist touches that at first glance appear merely atmospheric become inextricable from core elements of the film. *The Lady from Shanghai* features a film noir protagonist, the "Black Irish" Mike (Orson Welles), who is hired as a deckhand to accompany Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth) and her husband, the renowned attorney Arthur Bannister (Everett Sloane), on a pleasure cruise through the Panama Canal to California. Along the way, Mike becomes implicated in a life insurance scam that ends with a chase through San Francisco's Chinatown, followed by a shootout in a carnival hall of mirrors. The femme fatale Elsa is a White Russian with a Chinese past (we learn early in the film that she was born in China and lived in Shanghai), and the film hints that something traumatic and mysterious happened to her there—"You need more than luck in Shanghai," Elsa sighs, without elaborating. Mike, too, has a checkered and secretive past; we learn that he once killed a man in Spain. Elsa's husband Arthur Bannister, whom she has married to get United States citizenship, embodies the Law and Name of the Father, in a Lacanian sense. Like the title character of Welles's *Citizen Kane*, he believes that he can buy anything, even what purports to be outside of capital. As in many films of this genre the femme fatale is ultimately killed, and her death can be interpreted as a punishment or sacrifice demanded by the narrative.[43]

J. P. Telotte invokes a telling analogy to *Citizen Kane* in the course of his reading of *The Lady from Shanghai*. In *Voices in the Dark* he writes, "While Elsa's image dominates the film and, indeed, the consciousness of all these characters, she remains, like 'Rosebud,' largely a mystery, foreign and unfathomable despite Michael's best efforts to 'make her out' or narrate her allure. But through her we do glimpse another kind of otherness, one within the self, in fact, an absence or 'black hole' there whose very mark is desire."[44] Telotte suggests that Elsa's foreignness is a placeholder for a more universal and abstract otherness: an absence or void that structures human subjectivity and inaugurates desire, like the void theorized in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Despite the fact that Telotte's reading lacks explicit attention to the nexus of race and gender, his remarks help us to make an important observation about oriental unfathomability and its relation to the enigmatic sig-

nifier. As I discuss in the previous chapter, the Laplanchean enigmatic signifier is the object of a series of intensive exchanges. It is a core of alterity that comes to the self from an other and that is constitutive of the self, but due to its frustrating unintelligibility it is also projected back outward—onto subjects who are in some way marked as other (racially, sexually, geographically, linguistically, and so on). Through a dizzying series of displacements, this otherness comes to spark Mike's curiosity and solicit his desire, ultimately to invade his psyche and be projected back out again onto Elsa. However, as Laplanche notes, it is impossible to trace the enigmatic signifier back to its original inception. It is for all intents and purposes without origin, and we cannot say for certain whether it came definitively from Shanghai, from the dark continent of the feminine, from the machinations of a Western psyche, or from the mind of some distant psychical ancestor many generations ago.

E. Ann Kaplan also hints at the imprecation of enigma with the foundations of subjectivity in her reading of *The Lady from Shanghai*. In her essay "The 'Dark Continent' of *Film Noir:* Race, Displacement and Metaphor in Torneur's *Cat People* and Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai*," Kaplan, like other scholars, observes that Elsa's connection to San Francisco's Chinatown seems "unnecessary to the plot." She goes on to note that, like the allusions to Elsa's Chinese past, this connection is in fact "central to the unconscious level of the film." As Kaplan continues: "Not only is [Elsa] unnatural as a *woman*; she is also unnatural in being *close to the Chinese*. The entire sequence in Chinatown takes viewers into a strange world . . . We hear a language we cannot understand; we are shown a performance in an alien style and language, with people dressed in strange clothes. Elsa makes phone calls and speaks in Chinese so that we cannot understand what is going on."[45] This scene occurs after a chase through San Francisco's Chinatown, after Mike has fled his trial for murder. He seeks refuge in the Mandarin Theater, where a Chinese opera is being performed. Elsa follows him and gains permission to go backstage to use the telephone. In Cantonese, she informs her chauffeur Li about Mike's escape from the courthouse; the spectator is meant to understand that she and Li are plotting against Mike. There is a revelatory quality to this scene. It conveys knowledge to the spectator that Mike lacks, as he is out of earshot, hiding in the main auditorium. This is unusual given that *The Lady from Shanghai* presents action mainly from Mike's

Elsa's phone call: Rita Hayworth in *The Lady from Shanghai*.
(Columbia Tristar Home Video)

perspective; the film takes place in flashback, accompanied by his past-tense voice-over narration. Meanwhile, Mike also suffers the effects of a handful of pills that he has grabbed and gulped down in the courthouse, having done so to create a disruption that would allow him to escape. He has thus been shanghaied: rendered insensible with his faculties of reasoning stolen away from him, tricked and taken captive on board a ship of fools.

As Kaplan's reading implies, it is not so much the content of this bit of dialogue as its form that tips her hand to the viewer. Untranslated in the film, the Chinese language functions as a signal, much like Joel Cairo's Hong Kong coin and Geiger's slanting handwriting. When we hear Elsa speak, it betrays to us that she is in private communication with her Chinese servants, that they are her co-conspirators, and that she has connections to the local Chinese community in San Francisco. Elsa speaks broken Cantonese in this scene, despite the fact that she would presumably speak Mandarin or Shanghainese if she were from Shanghai; thus, Kaplan's "we" might apply equally well to English- and Chinese-speaking audiences.[46] As Kaplan suggests, due primarily to gender the femme fatale is a known and already familiar site for the

projection of unnaturalness or otherness in the genre of film noir. *The Lady from Shanghai* layers this projection with the orientalist one. In so doing, the film performs a chiasmatic gesture whereby the East is feminized and woman orientalized—a gesture that Rey Chow has discussed in relation to the production of China as a spectacle for the West.[47] Oliver and Trigo in their reading of *The Lady from Shanghai* note that Rita Hayworth's father spoke mainly Spanish; she thus represents a doubly coded internal alterity in this film. "The audience," they write, "silences the combined and excessive sounds of the distinct voices overflowing from both the character of Elsa and the actress Rita Hayworth: the sound of Cantonese inflected by English and by Spanish."[48]

The phone call is the second time that Elsa speaks Chinese, and thus it is the second signal that she is a participant in the plot to kill Grisby and frame Mike for the murder. During the chase through San Francisco's Chinatown that precedes Mike's arrival at the Mandarin Theater, Elsa stops to ask a shopkeeper in Chinese which direction Mike went. Meanwhile, Mike runs frantically through the streets, bewildered by a torrent of Chinese signs. Storefront signs, advertisements painted onto shop windows, and hanging meats and Chinese herbs dominate the frame. Some of the film's editing lends formal emphasis to Mike's disorientation with slight violations of the 180-degree rule. Abrupt changes of camera position, from ground-level to high-angle shots taken from above the crowded streets, add to the sense that Mike is lost in a maze. In a few shots, Elsa appears to be running in the opposite direction from Mike; she runs by two of the shops he has passed in reverse order, even though she is supposedly gaining on him. On a first viewing, the rapid pace of the editing masks these minor deviations from classical continuity style, but they become apparent upon closer scrutiny. In addition, several shots are filmed from inside the Chinatown shops, looking out at Mike and Elsa through the windows and their painted signs. Here the camera, and by extension the film's enunciation, occupy a looking position that seems to be aligned with the Chinatown community rather than with Mike or Elsa. The chase ends in the Mandarin Theater, where a Chinese opera is being performed. The drugged Mike collapses in the audience. The film leaves him there and cuts to the scene of Elsa's phone call to Li. Elsa then emerges into the auditorium and sits beside Mike. "Just relax and watch the play," she says.[49]

Chinatown chase: *The Lady from Shanghai*.
(Columbia Tristar Home Video)

Elsa's foreign speech seems at first to provide a psychical antidote to the iconic ambiguity that so often accompanies the orientalist mise-en-scène in film noir. That is, her utterances in Chinese form clues that reveal a fixed meaning: she is guilty of conspiracy, with the Chinese as well as with Bannister. These moments seem designed to reassure the viewer of the power of deductive reasoning, and of the possibility of a fixed correspondence between signs and their accompanying values. However, the peculiar shifts of the film's enunciation trouble this notion. The camera exposes Elsa as a traitor by revealing her private communications with the residents of Chinatown. In order to do so, it must depart from Mike and temporarily align itself with both Elsa and Chinatown. When the camera goes into the shop, and ventures backstage at the Mandarin Theater, the film's enunciation seems likewise to speak from these places, wittingly or not, and to collaborate with them. It is as if the enigmatic signifiers of Chinatown were being given permission to chime in with the film's authorial voice.

While on board the *Circe*, Elsa, wearing a captain's hat and helming the ship, tells Mike a Chinese proverb. "I was taught to think of love in Chinese," she says. "The Chinese say, it is difficult for love to last long,

therefore, one who loves passionately is cured of love in the end. Human nature is eternal. Therefore, one who follows his nature, keeps his original nature in the end." This bit of fortune-cookie sophistry presents a riddle that can be answered in various ways. For one, it might be read as a judgment upon Elsa herself, who in the end proves possessed of a core evil nature; if so, it foreshadows her betrayal and serves as a warning to Mike that he does not properly understand at the time. The circular structure of the proverb, with its repetitions and twinned doubling back upon itself, reveals a second meaning. Like cannibalistic sharks, Bannister, Elsa, and Grisby are locked into a self-enclosed triangle whose members ultimately destroy themselves, as is evidenced by Bannister's cockeyed plot to kill himself for insurance money. This circular logic is parodied in the film's trial scene when Bannister cross-examines himself. However, this vicious circle — that is, the desire for self-sufficiency, enclosure, sameness, and stasis — paradoxically renders otherness as part of the self. You can take Elsa out of Shanghai, but you cannot take the Shanghai out of Elsa.

Two memorable scenes from *The Lady from Shanghai* demonstrate visually this concern with the indistinguishability of self from other, and of the real from the virtual and imagistic. One takes place at the Steinhart Aquarium in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, where Elsa has arranged a secret meeting with Mike. Elsa and Mike appear mainly in close-up, occasionally illuminated but mainly silhouetted against the tanks. Shadowy giant sea creatures appear behind their heads. In this scene, the aquatic depths and their cannibalistic life-forms occupy the same plane as the surface dwellers. The underbelly of the sea now appears above ground, or perhaps the surface world has been submerged. We cannot tell who is a shark and who is prey, as Elsa's cryptic conversation with Mike suggests. The aquarium scene forms a pair with the famed hall-of-mirrors shootout at the film's conclusion, which takes place in the "crazy house," as Mike calls it, of an amusement park that has closed for the winter. Mike has been brought here by Elsa's servants in order to be killed. Whereas in the aquarium scene the characters appear in silhouette against the light of the glass tanks, in the funhouse the figures are illuminated against the dark background of the glass mirrors.

In the magic mirror maze, Welles finally undoes the distinction between representation and object.[50] The virtual mirror reflections of Bannister, Elsa, and Mike are indistinguishable from the bodies they

reflect; as Bannister observes, they cannot tell whether they are aiming at each other or at their mirror images. Elsa has finally revealed herself as Bannister's twin in murderous intent. As Bannister says to her, "Of course, killing you is killing myself. It's the same thing. But you know, I'm pretty tired of both of us." Welles's composition and editing in this sequence divide the shot into multiple planes. The disorienting signs are finally not those of Chinatown, but rather the refracted projections of the original characters. For his final magic trick, Welles fools his spectators by seeming to posit rigid binary oppositions between East and West, masculine and feminine, dark and light, reflection and reality, only to draw back the curtain and reveal their inseparability. East and West appear, through their representatives, in an infinite *mise-en-abyme* of mirror reflections. Each, it would seem, is the inextricable internal alterity of the other.

We can never be entirely freed from our fascination with lack, with what is missing from our being and what we imagine as hidden in the other's head.

—LEO BERSANI AND ULYSSE DUTOIT,
Caravaggio's Secrets

3 THE CHINATOWN SYNDROME

Roman Polanski's neo-noir film *Chinatown* (1974) features a protagonist who is enthralled and infuriated by a woman whom he imagines holds the key to a series of related enigmas he is trying to unravel. In typical noir fashion, the film reveals that the original mystery that detective Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) is dispatched to investigate—the extramarital affair of Hollis Mulwray—is but one facet in a prism of additional puzzles: who has killed Hollis; why water is being siphoned away during the night in drought-plagued Los Angeles; and why an air of secrecy surrounds Evelyn Mulwray (Faye Dunaway). Jake's trajectory is familiar to viewers of film noir: in his attempts to unravel the enigma, he himself becomes entangled in it. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, "the hero, the hardboiled investigator, is sent on a quest . . . whose final outcome is that he himself was from the beginning implicated in the object of his quest."[1] By the end of the film, Jake's assumptions about human behavior and sense of epistemological control are undone. There is something askew about Evelyn and the secrets with which she is associated, including the shady dealings with the Los Angeles water supply. *Chinatown* reflects on mechanisms by which this pattern of suspicion becomes linked to East Asia. Like the films I discuss in the previous chapter, *Chinatown* invokes the structure of desire and knowledge that Laplanche associates with the enigmatic signifier and gives it an Asian accent. But with the benefit of hindsight, *Chinatown* also comments upon Hollywood's intermittent history of orientalizing this enigma.

The title of Polanski's film involves a more self-conscious, tongue-in-cheek version of the trope that in the previous chapter I call the Shanghai gesture. Chinatown initially seems to be something of a red herring, as it is not a central concern or location of the film. However, like the house on Laverne Terrace in *The Big Sleep*, it will prove central to the film's logic in the end. What do we know about Chinatown? We learn that Jake worked the Chinatown beat on the police force before he became a private detective, and we learn that something traumatic involving a woman happened to him there. We never learn the details of this past. Like Elsa's foreign history in *The Lady from Shanghai*, it remains an unknown feature of the film's back story. "Chinatown" thus becomes a metaphor for something traumatic and sexual from a distant, perhaps repressed prior era—something that cannot be processed or consciously comprehended and that threatens to resurface in the present. In one account the film's screenwriter Robert Towne stated that he got the idea for the title from a police officer who, like Gittes, had worked the Chinatown beat in Los Angeles and had concluded from his experiences that "You don't know who's a crook and who isn't a crook," so "you just don't do a goddamned thing." Towne says that for him Chinatown became a synecdoche for Los Angeles as a whole: "A place where you have no idea what's going on," as well as a symbol for Gittes's "fucked-up state of mind."[2] These notes make explicit the association between Chinatown and epistemological crisis. They also suggest that Towne meant the film to suggest how difficult this crisis is to contain, as it seeps into the psyches of the ostensible enforcers of law and order (Jake), the surrounding city (Los Angeles), and the national culture industry (Hollywood).

Just as Chinatown is an enigmatic signifier for Jake Gittes, so too does *Chinatown* become one for the film's viewers. The title has presented a tantalizing cipher for film scholars. John Cawelti suggests that Chinatown is "a symbol of life's deeper moral enigmas, those unintended consequences of action that are past understanding and control."[3] John Belton takes a similar tack when he writes that the title refers "to a world that cannot be understood."[4] Belton also suggests that Jake identifies Evelyn Mulwray "both with Chinatown and the racial, cultural, and presumably sexual indecipherability with which it is associated," and, in a reference to the work of Orson Welles, makes note of Evelyn's orientalization: "As the femme fatale, Evelyn is Polanski's lady from Shanghai who . . . is given a Eurasian quality by

the make-up artist's orientalization of her face."[5] Michael Eaton offers that Chinatown is "not so much the topographical area of the title as the very memory of that space where nobody knows anything . . . where secure knowledge is impossible."[6] Like Belton, he also suggests that Chinatown is "a symbol for the feminine enigma."[7] Vernon Shetley concurs when he links the title to both the enigmatic and the feminine, and he writes that "the feminine, in *Chinatown*, is presented through figures of opacity or otherness, and is repeatedly likened to Chinatown itself in its unknowability and potential for danger."[8] Finally, Glenn Man addresses the film's marginalization of the Chinatown of its own title.[9]

These scholars seem to agree on two points. First, Chinatown signifies the unknown: it is a site of indecipherability and secrets from the past, and it is a place, both literal and metaphorical, where deductive inquiry reaches its limits. Second, Chinatown is associated with both alterity and femininity, in particular through the character of Evelyn Mulwray, who has ties to the Chinese immigrant community and is visually orientalized. Interestingly, like Telotte on *The Lady from Shanghai*, Belton invokes an analogy to *Citizen Kane*'s "Rosebud" in his analysis of the meaning of the film's title: "Because Chinatown is, like Rosebud in *Citizen Kane*, not seen until the last few minutes of the film, its meaning—i.e., what it designates—floats. The object or place to which the word refers remains unseen, enhancing its status as place of mystery and enabling it to function abstractly. It figures, then, as a quality or attribute that attaches itself to certain characters, like Evelyn . . . or it becomes associated with certain ideas, such as mystery, inscrutability, and finally, sexuality."[10] Belton's analogy helps us to draw further parallels between the two films. "Rosebud" is also an enigmatic signifier, one that serves as the prompt for a rich tapestry of storytelling and gives rise to multiple interpretations, both by characters within the film's diegesis and by its viewers. As in *Chinatown*, *Citizen Kane*'s penultimate shot reveals a concrete referent for this signifier, purportedly solving the riddle; however, upon further thought this solution fails to capture the full complexity of the puzzle. The accumulation of meaning has been too vast. The question "What does Chinatown mean?"—perhaps to an even greater extent than the question "What is Rosebud?"—lacks a stable answer. We never learn precisely what happened to Jake there in the film's back story, nor do we fully understand the nature and extent of Evelyn's ties to her ser-

vants' community there. We are also never told why *this* is the place that the law reaches its limits, rather than, say, the borders of Noah Cross's estate, or the tracts of arable land exchanged in his fraudulent sales. "Chinatown" finally seems to be a signifier for the cryptic itself; the answer to the question "What does Chinatown mean?" is "the enigmatic."

The film's final lines of dialogue allow us to take this notion yet further and to clarify its stakes. Earlier in the film, Jake and Evelyn have just made love, and while lying in bed Evelyn asks him, "What did you do in Chinatown?" To this Jake replies, "As little as possible." Growing ill at ease, he refers to the story of the unknown woman who died there from his past. Later, after Evelyn is shot while attempting to flee from Cross with her daughter Katherine, Jake repeats this phrase, "As little as possible," as if he were lost in a recollection of the earlier conversation. As Towne's notes on the script clarify, one does as little as possible in Chinatown because it is a place where "you don't know what's going on." Jake's repetition of the phrase indicates that he is also lost in the affect of the initial trauma that occurred there. Due to his own blindness to circumstances, he has failed once again to save a woman in danger.[11] Chinatown is the site and sign of this traumatic not-knowing, which is destined to be repeated until it is properly understood.

In reply to Jake's remark, Lieutenant Lou Escobar says, "Forget it, Jake, it's Chinatown." The comment is ironic: we could say that Jake's forgetting is not the solution but rather the *cause* of this recurrence of events. According to one style of psychoanalytic reading, Jake, in Freud's words, "is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past."[12] Such a reading, while compelling, has the consequence of reducing Chinatown to an element of Jake's psyche. This reading implies that Chinatown is but an arbitrary placeholder. It just so happens that Jake's trauma occurred in Chinatown, but it might have happened elsewhere, in which case his trauma would have another name (say, "New York" or "Colorado boardinghouse"), and the story would still go the same way. The film presents evidence to the contrary: its 1940s setting and intensive engagement with the aesthetics and problematics of film noir indicate that its title location was not chosen at random but rather in relation to prior examples of Hollywood orientalism. In addition, to attribute the

enigma of Chinatown to Jake is to suggest that it could be dispelled with greater scrutiny and analysis—that is, by upping the ante of deductive rationalism. Laplanche helps us to understand the futility of this goal, and how this pursuit can end up further cementing the defenses of repression against internal alterity. Finally, to paraphrase Roland Barthes, this method of reading makes the film close in on a "final" signified.[13] Chinatown now has a definite meaning; its signified is Jake's personal trauma. My sense is that the film actually makes Chinatown mean more than this, and suggests that its implications extend beyond Jake's psyche into the external world.

ECHO PARK *Chinatown* Revisited

One of the reasons that it is so tempting to read *Chinatown* through Jake's personal trauma and the notion of the repetition compulsion is that the film makes heavy use of the motif of doubling. There are many examples in addition to Jake's repeated "as little as possible." A key scene takes place in the Echo Park area of Los Angeles, the names Mulvihill and Mulwray share a first syllable, and Noah Cross's bifocals serve as a crucial piece of evidence. Even the soundtrack, with its high, repeated single piano notes, participates in this theme. When Evelyn offers Jake tea with "sugar, lemon, or both?" Jake's answer, "both," anticipates Evelyn's confession that Katherine is both her sister and her daughter. These doublings emphasize the idea that Jake repeats things without understanding them, and initially they seem to support the kind of psychoanalytic interpretation inspired by *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that I describe above.

Jake is also frequently confronted with code-like words that he fails to hear or interpret correctly, many of which he himself parrots back. At one point during the investigation, one of Jake's operatives overhears the phrase "apple core" while eavesdropping. In fact, the speaker has said "Albacore," the name of the club whose members have unwittingly been conscripted into a land ownership conspiracy. "Apple" is an overdetermined signifier, evoking meanings of original sin—also heard in the first syllable of Evelyn's name—as well as of the beginning of the alphabet and the origins of language. "Apple core" further suggests leftover and indigestible remains, or that which cannot be consumed or assimilated, like the enigmatic signifier in the psyche. A similar transposition occurs when Gittes encounters the name Jaspar

Lamarr Crabb. Evelyn Mulwray points out that it is an unforgettable name, yet for the time being it is ambiguous and overdetermined. The word "crab" also resonates with the film's water motif, and the question of why Los Angeles' water is being dumped during the night, as well as with the word "crabapple," another reference to fruit that is unfit for consumption.

The most telling of these verbal enigmatic signifiers pivots upon a tried and true source of ethnic comedy, the substitution of the letters L and R. Upon Gittes's first visit to the Mulwray estate he overhears the Asian gardener mutter the words, "bad for grass," but pronouncing "grass" as "glass."[14] The gardener's precise ethnicity is unclear; the actor who plays him, Jerry Fujikawa, is Japanese American.[15] This indeterminacy is in keeping with Hollywood's frequent amalgamation of various Asian ethnicities into a fictional category of vague orientalness. Jake responds to the gardener's accented remark by mimicking him sarcastically. In this scene there are several key clues that Jake fails to notice. In the most literal sense, the gardener's comment refers to the fact that the pond is filled with nonpotable salt water that is killing the grass. Salt water was also found in the lungs of the drowned Hollis Mulwray, whose murder Gittes is investigating. However, the parataxis also seems to reference a pair of eyeglasses that Jake spots in the pond, the bifocals that belong to Noah Cross and thus identify him as Mulwray's killer. Finally, the word "glass" connects with the squeaking sound of a car windshield being washed that the audience and Gittes have heard just seconds ago. This sound is unnaturally amplified in the film's soundtrack, as if to mark it as a clue joining the chorus of glass, water, and a clean car windshield (which will be spattered with blood in the film's denouement).

The gardener's slip in pronunciation is overdetermined, and it can be read psychoanalytically. However, it is not a parataxis in the usual sense of revealing something of its speaker's unconscious. Neither does it reveal something that has been repressed by Jake, through whom these scenes are focalized through point-of-view shots filmed with a mobile camera. It reveals a key clue that would help us to solve some of the film's driving enigmas: who has killed Hollis Mulwray, who has stolen Los Angeles' water, and how the two are related. The substitution of "glass" for "grass" curiously makes the gardener seem to speak from the same place as those responsible for the crimes, as well as from the place of the film's enunciation. Some encoded form of

"Bad for glass": Jack Nicholson and Jerry Fujikawa in *Chinatown*. (Paramount Home Video)

knowledge resides with the Chinese gardener. As a result, the gardener's off-hand, accented remark takes on an unexpected authority, and the film's enunciation gets an accent.

In attributing a secret knowledge to Asian characters, *Chinatown* comments on the representation of East Asia in those classical film noirs that cast these characters as the senders of enigmatic signifiers and withholders of their meanings. Often, these signifiers pertain to the identity of a criminal. In William Wyler's *The Letter* (1940), the dragon lady Mrs. Hammond possesses a letter that testifies to Leslie Crosbie's affair with her husband, and thus incriminates her in his murder. Arthur Lubin's *Impact* (1949) provides another example. In this film, the Chinese maid Su Ling (Anna May Wong) overhears what she assumes to be an argument between her employer Walter Williams and his wife Irene. Later, when Irene's lover accidentally dies during an attempt to kill Walter, Su Ling refuses to testify in court about the argument, thinking that to do so will incriminate her employer. In fact, though, she unwittingly holds the key to his exoneration, a hotel room key that proves that Irene was having an affair and conspiring against him. In other cases, Asian characters are cast as the bearers of privileged knowledge of other kinds. In *Blade Runner*, which also draws extensively on the tropes of film noir, an Asian shopkeeper has specialized knowledge that allows her to differentiate real

snake scales from fake ones. In another scene, the replicant leader Roy harasses the Chinese geneticist Hannibal Chew in an attempt to gain information about the length of his own lifespan.

The scene with Jake and the Asian gardener seems to quote a scene from Josef von Sternberg's *The Shanghai Gesture*. On his way to a Chinese New Year's banquet hosted by Mother Gin Sling, Sir Guy Charteris pauses to make a patronizing remark to one of his host's henchmen. In mock Pidgin English, he asks, "You likee Chinese New Year?" The thug responds with the same inflection, "Yes, I likee." Later in the film, at the conclusion of the vengeance-filled dinner party, Charteris wanders stunned into the midst of the Chinese New Year street celebration, his daughter Poppy having just been shot by her own mother. The henchman turns to Charteris and delivers the film's final line of dialogue: "You likee Chinese New Year?" The tables have been turned. Here, Chinese New Year takes on a significance analogous to that of Chinatown in Polanski's film: it is an explanation for the inexplicable. The line reveals that Charteris could not have been more wrong when he assumed himself to be in a position superior to that of the ethnic worker. *The Shanghai Gesture* leaves open the possibility that the thug has somehow known of Poppy's identity and foreseen the impending murder all along. Similarly, in *Chinatown* the gardener's ostensible concern is simply the spoiled lawn. However, the film allows for the possibility that he is in the know about Cross, and perhaps even attempting to convey a clue to Jake. Indeterminacy surrounds these exchanges of dialogue, but they appear to situate some vaguely divinatory or intuitive form of knowledge with the Chinese gardener and the thug. It is a form of knowledge that is also threatening and frightening, in that its contents concern things that elude the grasp of the white male protagonists. Moreover, these forms of knowledge sometimes penetrate the protagonists' very own subject positions.

Impact provides a "benign" example of this narrative pattern of Asian characters bearing secrets—namely, Su Lin withholding information to protect her employer. A threatening example is to be found in *The Letter*, when Leslie Crosbie is blackmailed by Mrs. Hammond and the phony, ingratiating clerk On Li Seng, who have incriminating information about her long-term affair with and murder of Mr. Hammond. There is sometimes a sense in which this knowledge turns the tables on a white character, mocking him or putting him in place,

although he may be unaware of it at the time. A paranoid style of mechanism reveals itself: first, the other knows something about me, something that I may not even know about myself; second, the other withholds this knowledge from me; and third, the other mocks and persecutes me with this knowledge.[16] It is as if through a series of projections the tables had been turned on orientalism. It is no longer the white, Western subject who, to paraphrase Edward Said, purports to have exclusive knowledge about the Orient. Rather, the white, Western subject imputes this epistemological imbalance back the other way, and worries about the consequences. In *Chinatown*, the film's enunciation seems to side with the gardener, not with Jake, in this exchange.

The "bad for glass" moment is not the only time Jake unthinkingly mimics the film's marginal Asian characters, and neither is it the only time he finds his blind spots exposed in connection with them. On another visit to the Mulwray estate, he performs a mumbling imitation of a Chinese domestic when she tells him, "Mrs. Mulwray no home." In another scene, Jake repeats an ethnic joke that his barber tells him. The barber tells the joke in an attempt to distract Jake from another customer who is harassing him about having made the front page of a gossip rag, with a story about how he uncovered Hollis Mulwray's alleged affair ("You've got a hell of a way to make a living," the customer chides). Before the barber delivers the punch line, the film cuts back to Jake's office, where Jake is in the process of retelling the joke to his staff. The joke concerns a man having marital problems, whom a friend instructs to "screw the way the Chinese do it . . . get up, read a magazine, go and look at the moon, and then go back and screw some more." The joke precedes both the scene with Evelyn's gardener and the scene in which Jake's Chinatown past is revealed, and thus comprises the film's first reference to Chineseness. The punch line occurs when the man takes his friend's advice, only to have his wife ask him why he is "screwing like a Chinaman." The implication is that she knows from experience.

Glenn Man comments that this joke "plays upon white males' fear of . . . sexual takeover of their women" and "feeds into Gittes' sexist attitude."[17] Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* provides a method for a similar reading of the joke. Freud describes the function of hostile or "tendentious" jokes, of which ethnic jokes form a subcategory, as to "exploit something ridiculous in our enemy which

we could not, on account of the obstacles in the way, bring forward openly or consciously."[18] The comedy functions to keep alterity at bay. In this case, though, the joke work is reversed: the husband, not the Chinaman, is finally the butt of the joke. The husband finds himself unexpectedly in the position of the racial other, both because he is mimicking the alleged "Chinese" style of lovemaking, and because it seems that a Chinese man has occupied his place in relation to his wife at some point in the past. The joke is funny to Jake because it concerns cuckoldry and supports his assumptions about the givenness of infidelity (when the fake Mrs. Mulwray comes to his office and announces, "I think my husband is having an affair," Jake responds sarcastically, "No, really?"). It confirms his sense of superiority over his clients and their spouses—people who, like the husband in the joke and Hollis Mulwray, have had the wool pulled over their eyes and who are not as savvy as Jake about the way desire works. As Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo neatly sum up, the joke is finally on Jake: "*Chinatown* is a bad joke, and Jake is the butt of the joke."[19] Polanski's camera reveals that Evelyn is standing in the doorway behind him during his off-color recitation. This is the only time in the film that we are provided a superior looking position to Jake's; that is, that the narration departs from its third-person limited focalization to show us something that he does not see. His coworkers try to alert him to her presence, but Jake proceeds to make a fool of himself before they are able to stop him. As in the scene with the gardener, the film's enunciation seems to collaborate behind Jake's back with an Asianness that reveals a point of view beyond Jake's perspective, implicitly interfering with Western male consciousness.

The film's final shot makes a similar move, as the camera ascends through the crowd of Chinese onlookers at the scene of Evelyn's car accident to assume a perspective superior to Jake's. This perspective seems to be that of Chinatown itself. In the joke scene it is the woman, Evelyn, and not the racial other, who occupies this position of superior vision and knowledge. We need not disregard the fact that this scene is organized around the telling of an ethnic joke; indeed, to do so would be to reproduce Jake's own blind spots with regard to the illuminating connections among race, gender, and paranoid knowledge. The Chinese joke confirms Jake's obstinate notion that the Mulwray case pivots on run-of-the-mill adultery. This notion—and along with it, Jake's confidence in his understanding of how adultery works—is precisely

A crowd of onlookers: *Chinatown*. (Paramount Home Video)

what prevents him from seeing the less obvious aspects of the case: the full scope of the water scandal and the fact that Evelyn's infidelity has not in fact been with an "other" (Chinese or otherwise) but with her own father. These two things are related—"interchangeable," even, as Shetley suggests—insofar as they are the results of Noah Cross's possessiveness.[20] He hoards both water and daughter, the final and crowning rhyme in *Chinatown*'s collection of echoes.

Finally, the barber's joke emblematizes a broader thematic of the film and a particular concern of Jake's: the mistaking of sameness for difference and difference for sameness. Jake is so conditioned by his divorce work to seek out and discover wayward, wandering erotic interest—like the adulterous wife of his client, or the husband who gets up to look at the moon while screwing—that he cannot imagine a version of desire still stuck in the familial confines of the Oedipal relation, despite the fact that this is precisely where he himself lives. The joke's final punch line is delivered much later in the film, when Evelyn confesses that Katherine is both her sister and her daughter. In Lévi-Strauss's terms, Jake could be said to mistake endogamy (an obligation to marry within a defined community or group) for exogamy (a prohibition on marrying outside a defined community or group)—in other words, to see miscegenation in place of incest.[21] Where Jake expects to find a movement outward and straying away from the family into foreign territory, he instead finds Cross's powerful centripetal pull back.

Chinatown depicts and critiques a limit-case of this scenario. Cross's claim over Evelyn represents an extreme pole of sameness and repetition, as well as an absolute drive toward possession. In structuralist terms, Cross demonstrates an unwillingness to relinquish the daughter for exchange and the new alliances that might be formed through this process. Like his claim over the water that sustains the greater Los Angeles area, Cross's claim over Evelyn, and later, Katherine, represents a kind of maniacal, hoarding desire: a desire to keep currency and resources out of circulation, and thus uncontaminated by the hands of others and outsiders. When Jake finally learns of Cross's scheme and asks what he has to gain from diverting the water supply, Cross's answer, "the future," suggests a delusional position in which the only way to ensure a legacy is through absolute ownership over life-giving resources. As Shetley astutely notes, Cross's possessiveness may be read as a critique of capitalism: "The institution of private property itself, the very foundation of the capitalist economic and social order, becomes identified in the course of the film with the horror of incest."[22] The film's red herring of a title plays on our expectation that these horrors—incest, murder, robber-baron economics—will be associated with the world of Chinatown. In fact, they belong to Cross's world (imagine the film's final bit of dialogue transposed: "Forget it, Jake, it's capitalism," or "it's patriarchy"). Like Jake, the film's spectators have been schooled to locate these violations elsewhere, in lawless ethnic ghettos, on faraway continents, or in an ancient past. *Chinatown* provides a reminder that sometimes they come from within.

Chinatown's incest plot offers an extreme solution to the cultural problem of the seduction and concomitant threat posed by the enigmatic signifier of the Orient and its intrusion into the Western psyche. The threat of an unintelligible, sexualized, and matriarchal East that Evelyn evokes as the orientalized femme fatale—as well as the risk of miscegenation she evokes through her close ties to Khan and her other Chinese servants—must be neutralized or assuaged by reclaiming absolute possession. In addition, there is a perhaps yet more alarming peril, the invisible omnipresence of Chinatown throughout Los Angeles that threatens to expose a core of alterity upon which the Western psyche props its sense of self. *Chinatown* assuages these anxieties through a severe and radical solution: by recourse to the insular kinship structure of father-daughter incest. In Lacanian terms, the Name of the Father is asserted over and against the enigmatic signs of the

East. But *Chinatown*'s self-conscious use of these narrative devices, and of its title metaphor, suggest that it is not so much a story about the horrors of a lawless Chinatown than a story that exposes, point by point, the mechanisms behind that projection. The film systematically reveals the projective reversals that sustain these premises: Chinatown as the place where they lack modern kinship structures, Chinatown as the place where rules about property are not enforced, Chinatown as the place where unlawful acts go unpunished, and so on. Similar projections continue to inform mainstream United States perceptions of China in the twenty-first century, as the White House issues stern denunciations of China's human rights violations, unlawful detentions, and government surveillance that hypocritically imply that such practices would not be tolerated at home.[23]

Chinatown sometimes represents projective paranoia and its effects through images of seeping water. Jake is twice doused by run-off (and on one occasion loses his shoe in the process); there are dripping sounds both in Ida Sessions's apartment and the county morgue; we see two cars spring leaks, one outside the barber shop where Jake first hears the Chinaman joke and one in the orange grove that he investigates to see whether it is being irrigated. The water in *Chinatown* is already contaminated: stolen and rerouted, but also accented, "bad for glass," and infused with the salt of the Pacific Ocean that separates the Asian continent from the American one. Its otherness threatens at every turn to seep into the culture at large. Hollis Mulwray, the film reveals, was "into tide pools" and saw them as symbols of the origins of life. Like tide pools, the ornamental pools in the Mulwray garden and the lake in Los Angeles' Echo Park conjure up the notion of a manmade oasis surrounded by a hostile desert environment. In this way, they are like the nuclear family or the Oedipal triangle, sanctuaries of constancy and sameness that appear to provide respite from a hostile external world. But like these small bodies of water, the family is a false, manufactured oasis where both the security it appears to offer and the threats against which it appears to protect are largely imaginary. One of those threats is nearby Chinatown, not just the enigmatic signifier or symbol of unintelligibility, but the immigrant community it houses and the lawless enclave for which Jake and Escobar take that community.

The nautical and water motifs in both *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Chinatown* might be read as distorted reflections of an anxiety over

trans-Pacific commerce, both economic and cultural. Bannister's lording over the high seas is in many ways equivalent to Cross's hoarding and diversion of the public water supply. The Pacific Ocean is both a barrier that keeps East safely separate from West, both psychologically and militarily, and the conduit that allows for trade and exchange between Asia and the United States. The images of contained water in both films—the pond in *Chinatown*, the aquarium in *The Lady from Shanghai*—are similarly ambivalent. On the one hand, these oases are reassuringly separate, cultivated, ornamental, and they are to be contemplated without fear of leakage or drowning. On the other hand, like immigrant ghettos or incense, they threaten to spill out into the surrounding areas and to expose the liquidity of the boundary that keeps one separate from the other.

RACE AND SIMULATION *Blade Runner*

Anxiety over trans-Pacific commerce indirectly informs Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), a film that is of a piece with *Chinatown* in its exploration of orientalist tropes within a neo-noir framework. I begin my reading of *Blade Runner* with a brief digression—a parable about a different Chinatown, and a problem regarding mimesis that occurred there. In January 2006, an article in the *New York Times* described raids on vendors of imitation handbags in New York's Chinatown, conducted by armed private investigators hired by the Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy Group.[24] This raid took place in the aftermath of an agreement won in federal court that required the vendors' landlords to post signs informing the public that the vendors were not authorized sellers. The agreement also made it easier for landlords to evict tenants suspected to be purveying such goods. In an article on a related topic that appeared in the *New Yorker* a little over a year later, Larissa MacFarquhar profiled Harley Lewin, an intellectual property lawyer and trademark protection specialist for the firm Greenberg Traurig. MacFarquhar's article is written in a style that ever so slightly evokes the conventions of film noir. Lewin's workday as she describes it seems to resemble that of a 1940s vice officer. She quotes Lewin giving instructions on how to conduct a search for pirated property, and he does so in a style reminiscent of the hard-boiled language of the noir private investigator: "We don't raise our voices. Everybody's addressed 'Mr.'

and 'sir' and 'Thank you.' Asians respect authority and get real quiet on you, so you can feel full of power if you're not careful."[25]

The popular discourse about counterfeit designer objects, pirated DVDs and music, and other imitation versions of Western goods evokes racialized fears that hark back to maritime piracy in South China and Southeast Asia. This anxiety resurfaces in the early twenty-first century in tandem with China's rise as an economic power. In contemporary retellings of the piracy story in the popular press, Chinese counterfeiting is sometimes perceived to be the cause of a massive economic crisis. In 1999, the journalist Paul Paradise claimed that foreign pirating of United States property, perpetrated mainly by the People's Republic of China, posed a multi-billion dollar threat to the United States economy. As Paradise put it, "Prescription pills, automobile and airplane parts, heart pumps, garments, and a multitude of consumer products have been counterfeited . . . In modern times, the U.S. business community has become the principle victim of the explosive growth of counterfeit products."[26] In April 2006, President Hu Jintao of China paid a diplomatic visit to the United States for the purpose of "allaying fears about China's ambitions" and to "clear U.S. minds of doubts and suspicion about China."[27] The move to private policing of Asian piracy, and the targeting of immigrant communities in particular, suggest that such fears have been severe. China, according to popular discourse, has a repetition compulsion of a different sort, an unchecked desire to imitate the West. The practice of third-shift manufacturing has raised the anxiety level yet higher. As a consequence of outsourcing, third-shift products are manufactured during factory off-hours using the same equipment, and at times even the same materials, as the authentic, licensed versions of those products. These items are only detectable when a greater quantity of product turns up on the market than the trademark holder had originally ordered or paid for.[28]

While *Blade Runner* is not "about" piracy, the film does raise the question of racialized fears about false copies and their effect on the United States economy. It does so in ways that seem to presage twenty-first-century fears about the digital piracy of film, video, and music. The Hollywood film industry continues to play a formative role in shaping the legal definitions of property, both domestically and internationally, in terms of what counts as intellectual property, to

whom it belongs, and for how long. According to United States law, piracy is defined as a use of material that "robs the author of profit."[29] As Lawrence Lessig points out, one can argue that the digital sharing of electronic materials does not in fact deprive the author of profit, due to the unlimited number of copies that may be made and the fact that many users would not pay for the material in the first place, in combination with the fact that these users are not reselling the downloaded content. Lessig also points out that the sharing of electronic content can also be understood as a protest against an overly controlling industry, a political act that aims to prompt transformations in the market in which this practice intervenes.[30] Edison's early legal entanglements suggest that moguls in the United States film industry have not always been the victims of piracy; rather, they have been on both sides of the piracy equation from the industry's earliest days.[31] As Lessig notes, Disney's appropriation and subsequent copyrighting of materials that were previously in the public domain had a profound effect on international copyright laws to privilege the rights of large corporations over and against those of the public at large. In addition to the film industry's history of appropriation, the United States did not respect foreign copyright laws for the first one hundred years of its sovereignty. The ever-increasing extension of copyright terms has occurred in large part due to the efforts of film industry lobbyists. While this history in no way justifies the criminal practices of counterfeiting or the selling of goods under fraudulent claims about their authenticity, one cannot help but note the double standard invoked by media corporations.

A contemporary look at *Blade Runner* reveals newly relevant ideas about the connections among copies, property, and East Asia. As a dystopic fantasy set in Los Angeles in the year 2019, this film imagines a future in which Asian corporations dominate the global economy, with their fluorescent trademarks colonizing the sky. A Pan Am Airlines globe, Atari logo, and TDK insignia blink on and off, while below, a neon dragon mocks passers-by, snapping and sticking out its tongue.[32] Signs and logos are everywhere. A young woman in a geisha costume appears on a giant outdoor monitor. An audio advertisement cajoles lingering earth dwellers to migrate to the "off-world colonies," a land of "golden opportunity and adventure." This promise of a better life in a distant world seems to echo that offered to mid-nineteenth century Chinese immigrants lured to the Gold Mountain of California

with the promise of riches. Most of these immigrants ended up working as coolie labor on the transcontinental railroad and became members of a diasporic, stranded labor force.[33] In *Blade Runner*, though, emigration is offered strictly to the upper classes, courtesy of the Shimago-Dominga Corporation, whose tagline is "Helping America move into the new world." The whole of the earth has been beset by white flight. Japanese corporations control access to this off-world version of the exurbs, but the bowels of the city are populated by stranded people of color, the majority of whom seem to belong to various Asian ethnicities: noodle shop owners, technicians, and other figures who bustle through the streets on bicycle and by foot. They mingle with Orthodox Jews, Hare Krishnas, and various other characters who are marked in the film, often by their choice of headwear, as members of ethnic and religious minorities, immigrant populations, and disability groups. Many of them speak a hybrid language called "city-speak," a mixture of Japanese, Spanish, and German.

In the America imagined in *Blade Runner* there is another, more radically different "other"—namely the replicants, the genetically engineered slave laborers who are virtually identical to humans and are undetectable except under the closest scrutiny. This class of beings, we learn from a title at the start of the film, was made illegal on earth after a rebellion by a group of combat replicants in the off-world colonies, and a special squad of police called blade runners has been given orders to kill them upon detection. There are many ways to interpret the figure of the replicants that have implications for thinking about race and other forms of sociopolitical difference. The film's source material, Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), seems implicitly to relate the persecution of the replicants to the red scare and fears of communist infiltration. The replicants in the novel can also be linked to the discovery of DNA (for which James D. Watson and Francis Crick were awarded the Nobel Prize in 1962): the text's concerns about the mechanization and loss of individuating traits such as memory and affect seem connected to this scientific development. Both novel and film contain sections that explicitly ask us to read the replicants in terms of slavery and black-white race relations in the United States. The audio advertisement promoting immigration to the off-world colonies claims that these societies "duplicate the halcyon days of the pre–Civil War Southern states," and they offer free replicants to serve "either as a body of servants or tireless field

hands . . . as specified by you before your departure from Earth."[34] According to this reading, the escaped replicants retell the nineteenth-century narrative of the fugitive slave, and their movements through earth society seem to reference a narrative of racial passing. Along similar lines, the replicants could be viewed as inhabiting a plight similar to that of the "illegal alien," a category of noncitizen through which, as Mae Ngai and others have noted, racialized ideologies intersect with the law.[35]

These readings are made complicated by the visual appearance of the replicants in both the film and the novel. In the film some are white, even Aryan in appearance, particularly Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), the ringleader of the rebel group of Nexus 6 replicants targeted by the blade runner Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford). The novel, by contrast, describes Roy in more orientalized terms: Roy has "intelligent eyes but flat, mongolian features" that give him "a brutal look," and his eyes are "small and oblique."[36] Further complicating matters are the cast of minor Asian characters and extras who populate the film, but not the novel, including the elderly Cambodian shopkeeper who uses a microscope to identify a snake scale, and the Chinese geneticist Hannibal Chew of L.A. Eyeworks, who designs eyes for the replicants. The corporate mastermind behind the replicant industry is called Tyrell in the film, but in the novel he has the Jewish surname Rosen, which is shared by his replicant "niece" Rachael.

Kaja Silverman offers a way to read the figure of the replicants that does not require that we assign to them a single analogue in our current lexicon of racial and ethnic identities. She suggests that from the outset of *Blade Runner* "we are encouraged to understand the primary difference organizing the world of Los Angeles, 2019—the difference, that is, between replicants and humans—as an ideological fabrication."[37] According to this reading, this world's elaborate Voight-Kampff testing system would be analogous to nineteenth-century pseudosciences such as phrenology and craniometry. Silverman goes further by suggesting not only that the replicants are human but that they also appear to embody their humanity more fully than do the other characters. Although the world they inhabit has stereotyped them as unfeeling, they appear to experience and to express empathy, loss, and anxiety more acutely than do humans. In this way, *Blade Runner* follows a tradition of science fiction film that explores the limits of who and what count as human, or in terms borrowed from

Collodi's *Pinocchio* story, as "real." As Slavoj Žižek puts it, "The ultimate lesson of virtual reality is the virtualization of our 'true' reality."[38] If the replicants' memories and fantasies are artificially implanted then so are those of the humans, as Silverman claims in her reading, at least to the extent that they come to us from the outside and have been irrevocably transformed through psychical cathexis.

The Asian presence in both *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner* is vexed in unique ways that relate to the dynamics of internal alterity I have been describing. Mike Davis in his essay "'Chinatown,' Part Two? The 'Internationalization' of Downtown Los Angeles" comments on a double influx of "foreign" interests into downtown Los Angeles during the 1980s. He writes that in the redevelopment of Los Angeles's downtown, "there is no single, master logic of restructuring, rather the complex intersection of two separate macro-processes: one based on the overaccumulation of bank and real-estate capital (most recently, from the recycling of the East Asian trade surplus to California); the other arising from the reflux of low-wage manufacturing and labor-intensive services in the wake of unprecedented mass immigration from Mexico and Central America."[39] *Blade Runner*'s landscape could be seen as manifesting a paranoid version of the stratified society that Davis describes, where Los Angeles and the United States have effectively become a part of the third world, permeated with the East and with the Southern Hemisphere from the highest economic echelons down to the lowest labor forces. The omnipresence of tropical rain in the film suggests that the very climate of desert Los Angeles has begun to mimic that of the Pacific Islands, a message that is duplicated by extra-diegetic Asian string music on the soundtrack. This would seem to be a yellow peril–style representation, where the influx of Asian capital is conflated with the arrival of dark-skinned immigrants into service-sector and technical jobs.

In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Lisa Lowe reads *Blade Runner* as an image of dystopic multiculturalism gone awry. She argues that "*Blade Runner*'s representation of a third world, largely Asian, invasion of Los Angeles rearticulates orientalist typographies in order to construct the white citizen against the background of a multicultural dystopia."[40] She opposes the film's dystopic vision to the vision of the Los Angeles Festival of 1990. She claims that this festival, by contrast, offered a utopic articulation of liberal pluralism. Lowe points to two ways that the film presents East Asia's presence in

the United States, one threatening and the other assuaging. On the one hand, Lowe argues, *Blade Runner* casts Asia as "the 'foreign' threat to U.S. capital" through a mise-en-scène dominated by Asian corporate signs. Along similar lines, Žižek suggests that *Blade Runner* depicts a world in which "corporate capital has succeeded in penetrating and dominating the very fantasy of our being: none of our features are really 'ours.'"[41] On the other hand, Lowe suggests, Asia also provides a source "for the 'hordes' of Asian immigrants involved in service-sector labor" in Los Angeles, and thereby serves as the "occulted horizon" or foil for the image of the "free, white liberal subject."[42] She thereby calls attention to the double valence of *Blade Runner*'s vision of Asia, which casts the Orient as an invading force at both ends of the economic spectrum. The Eastern other is simultaneously menacing and reassuring, with its prism facets of corporate evil and immigrant labor ripe for exploitation. This two-faced quality recalls Homi Bhabha's discussion in *The Location of Culture* of the fetishistic, divided belief that accompanies stereotypical images. Such images, Bhabha notes, evoke the anxiety and threat of difference while at the same time warding it off.[43] A similar motif seems to be at work in the raids on the Canal Street handbag sellers, which attempt to avenge international trade imbalances with displays of force directed at local Chinese and African immigrant vendors in New York's Chinatown.

The scholarship I have mentioned thus far was produced in the 1980s and 1990s, following *Blade Runner*'s initial theatrical release in 1982 and the release of the director's cut in 1992. Returning to *Blade Runner* today allows us to see new critical potential in the film. If *Blade Runner* offers up stereotypical visions of the East, of immigration, and of a blighted multicultural metropolis, it also reveals that these representations are united by a common theme—that of a paranoia surrounding imitation. As Silverman notes, similarity is in many ways just as threatening as difference, if not more so.[44] As Lacan has suggested, it can give rise to unbridled forms of aggression.[45] Underlying the fears about Asia as they are expressed in popular cultural narratives seems to be a fear that Asia will mimic American-style capitalism and reproduce American-style consumer goods to the point of outperforming their United States counterparts. In turn, the Asian immigrant is commonly perceived as the assimilator, the model minority who copies white America so completely that she surpasses or displaces it.[46] The theme thus permeates both the global and the local

sides of the stereotype. These fears call attention to the paradoxical nature of this form of racism, which insists on the other's irreducible difference while simultaneously raising alarms about the other's potential to become indistinguishable from the self.

THE ORIGAMI UNICORN

In *Blade Runner*, the replicants' indistinguishability from humans constitutes the primary problem. Their similarity is more threatening than their alterity, and a whole arsenal of machinery and police protocols are mobilized to try to reinscribe difference. As the replicants are not marked by skin color or other clear visual features, Deckard and his colleagues must turn to other signifiers to perform this task such as subtle movements in the pupil of the eye and so on. Police officer Gaff (Edward James Olmos) attempts to reinscribe this difference using origami figures as cryptic messages that he leaves at various locations. The first of these is a small folded chicken that Gaff drops on a table after Deckard argues that he has quit the police force and will not assassinate any more replicants. Gaff leaves the second of these folded paper signs in a replicant's apartment. This human stick figure indicates that the police know he is a replicant, and it reads as an implicit death threat. The figure appears to bear an erection, indicating that Gaff suspects or knows that Deckard is attracted to Rachael. The final origami creature appears at the end the film: a silver paper unicorn that Gaff leaves in the hallway outside Deckard's apartment. Rachael nearly steps on this unicorn as she and Deckard set off to flee the blighted city.

Most concur that this final origami sign is meant to indicate that Deckard himself is a replicant—that is, a fabrication like a mythical creature. Director Ridley Scott has authorized this reading in various interviews. The unicorn belongs to a subset of a category of small, tangible objects appearing frequently in film noir as well as in the gangster film that convey a message of threat to their recipients. This category of objects includes the carved Chinese dagger that the dragon lady–like Mrs. Hammond leaves on Leslie Crosbie's doorstep in *The Letter*, and the broken porcelain figurine that Mother Gin Sling leaves at her daughter Poppy's place at the banquet table in *The Shanghai Gesture.* Like the décor in Geiger's house in *The Big Sleep* and other objects that I describe in the previous chapter, these objects are overdetermined, suspicious, and threatening. In addition, they partake of a

The origami unicorn: *Blade Runner.* (Warner Home Video)

futural temporality. In contrast to the photographs that mark the replicants as sentimental beings and that invoke the past, the origami signs are anticipatory or even prophetic.

It is possible to interpret *Blade Runner* in a way that recenters the film on Deckard, in a manner analogous to the reading of *Chinatown* in which the title's final referent is Jake's own psychical trauma. Such an interpretation would claim that the enigma is ultimately not to be found in the replicants, their creator, or among the cast of marginal foreign characters who populate this postapocalyptic landscape. Rather, it is to be found in Deckard, who is himself a replicant, permeated by the very alterity he had sought to eliminate. Such a reading deconstructs the difference between replicants and humans, whether by emphasizing their common humanity or their common "replicantness." However, as with the analogous reading of *Chinatown* — the one that claims that Chinatown is something inside Jake — there are benefits and drawbacks to an interpretation that democratizes otherness. On the one hand, such a reading allows us to see how the alterity that Deckard attempted to locate outside, in the world, turns out to be a projection, a part of the self. On the other hand, it recenters the film on Deckard as individual subject, a move that risks occluding the much vaster imprecation of orientalism with enigmatic signifiers. Just as Chinatown is a sign not simply for the unknown in Jake's psyche but

for much larger unknowns about desire and signification, so the origami unicorn at Deckard's doorstep does not simply reveal that he is a replicant but rather becomes a cipher that evokes and plays into the very unknowns that define human subjectivity more generally.

Whether or not we take the unicorn as an indicator of Deckard's replicant status, one could argue that it is Deckard's very capacity to receive and be mystified by this sign that marks him as the bearer of a psyche. Deckard's ability—to paraphrase Laplanche—to wonder what it means and why it has been addressed to him marks him as a complex being, human or otherwise, enmeshed in an intersubjective network. Deckard's very capacity to enter into the circuit of communication that this sign invites, that is, deconstructs the difference between humans and replicants. Catherine Liu makes the larger stakes of this enigma clear by altering its terms. In her reading, Deckard asks himself not whether he, too, is a replicant but rather asks the question "Am I or am I not a murderer?"[47] The origami figures are the oriental emissaries of a Sphinx-like riddle. They do not simply designate but instead address a question to Deckard and his kin: What makes an individual real or imaginary, the same or other?

The origami figurines belong to a larger collection of indeterminate Asian signs that appear in *Blade Runner*, many of which seem to participate in complex structures of address. Janet Bergstrom suggests that *Blade Runner*'s "cluttered" aesthetic and "stylistic virtuosity" represent "a deliberate move against the clean, spare, geometric, controlled look" of films like *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).[48] She goes on to note that *Blade Runner* provides "a visual field that verges on incoherence . . . The film seems to follow two different tracks at the same time: one is a story line, while the other is like a stylistic force field that resists the stabilization of the film's referential dimension at every moment."[49] The film's rubbish-filled Chinatowns, Japanese corporate logos, and taunting neon dragons belong to the collection of signs that make up this "stylistic force field." There is also a Thai sculpture in Deckard's apartment that is strongly reminiscent of the one that Phillip Marlowe finds in Geiger's house in *The Big Sleep*, the one that contains the camera with no film. Indeed, it is almost as if the statue has been brought over from the set of the other film. The presence of this sculpture underlines *Blade Runner*'s deep engagement with the problematics and aesthetics of film noir and with how they are in fact linked together, for, as I discussed in chapter 2, noir attempts to solve

problems of knowledge visually, through mise-en-scène, that cannot be resolved by the plot.[50] The statue also connects Deckard to both Marlowe the private investigator and Carmen the femme fatale. Like Marlowe, he bumps up against the limits of rational inquiry when confronted with enigmatic Asian objects. He is also himself such a cipher: an empty head, possibly just a robot or recording device. Like Carmen, he has corpses lying at his feet.

Through this statue *Blade Runner* pays explicit homage to *The Big Sleep.* The film also appears to reference *The Lady from Shanghai* in a chase scene through a Chinatown-like area. As in *The Lady from Shanghai*, the chase is edited with rapid cuts that occasionally violate Hollywood's rules of continuity, and the streets are ablaze with disorienting neon signs. The scene culminates in Deckard's slaying of the replicant Zhora. Both chases end with a shattering of glass and seem to index an impossible moment in which false images will finally be sorted out from true ones, and reflections will be smashed and exposed as copies. The scene from *Blade Runner* emphasizes this notion by including shop window mannequins in the mise-en-scène.

To these images, we might add that of the Bradbury Building where the replicant Pris (Daryl Hannah) finds refuge with J. F. Sebastian (William Sanderson). The Bradbury sits across the street from Million Dollar Theater, which originally opened in 1918 and was owned by Sid Grauman, owner of the Chinese Theater in Hollywood. The building also housed the offices of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water Board and Mr. William Mulholland, the source for the character of Noah Cross in Polanski's *Chinatown.* Peter Wollen notes that the location of *Blade Runner* is in many ways a "composite world city": the novel is set in San Francisco, but the screenwriter Hampton Fancher changed the location to Los Angeles and Scott's inspiration was New York. Wollen reports that parts of the film were in fact shot on the "classic New York street" set on the Warner Brothers lot, where some scenes from *The Big Sleep* (set in Los Angeles) and *The Maltese Falcon* (set in San Francisco) were also filmed.[51] These connections yield rich associations to Hollywood's legacy of cinematic orientalism. The cityscape images of this fictional place, with their layers of glass, makeup, and simulated display, furthermore suggest a self-conscious invocation of this legacy on the part of the filmmakers. They seem to belong to a world in which copies are already thought of as indistinguishable and inseparable from originals.

Deckard's apartment: *Blade Runner.* (Warner Home Video)

Giuliana Bruno suggests that *Blade Runner* is a quintessentially 1980s "postmodern pastiche," a schizophrenic melding of various cultural, geographic, and historical references.[52] The device of the replicants, she argues, is "almost a literalization of Baudrillard's theory of postmodernism as the age of simulacra."[53] Invoking Gilles Deleuze, Bruno goes on to note that in a world of simulation, "there is no difference between 'false' and 'true,' 'real' and 'imaginary' . . . It is, indeed, in simulations that the power of the replicants resides. Since the simulacrum is the negation of both original and copy, it is ultimately the celebration of the false as power and the power of the false."[54] *Blade Runner* does indeed seem to embrace the powers of the false, simulation, and the copy. In so doing, it shows how the postmodern undoing of identity and authenticity relate to questions of race. As Peter Wollen remarks in "Fashion/Orientalism/the Body"—an essay on the postmodern embrace of ornament and quasi-mannerist style—"The revival of the decorative and the extravagant is symptomatic of the decline of modernism, but it is not an exemplary alternative or antidote. The problem in the end is how to disentangle and deconstruct the cascade of antinomies . . . functional/decorative, useful/wasteful, natural/artificial . . . machine/body, masculine/feminine, west/east."[55] *Blade Runner* is concerned, I would argue, with a similar set of binary

oppositions and their mapping onto one another—that is, not only with the simulacrum writ large but also with the East's imitation of the West, and the notion of the Orient itself as simulacrum. The film seems to express an awareness of the fact that the value of the original in some ways depends upon the presence of the copy, and that authenticity only has meaning when there are inauthentic copies in circulation.

Blade Runner's own exhibition history unwittingly comments upon the very problem of the relation between authentic original and false copy. Against Ridley Scott's wishes, the original United States theatrical release of the film, known as the "Domestic Cut," included a voice-over narration by Harrison Ford as Deckard, purportedly added to reduce confusion over plot points that test audiences had found perplexing. It also included a final, optimistic sequence showing Deckard and Rachael escaping to greener pastures, cobbled together from stock footage left over from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. As Bergstrom notes, Kubrick's film partakes of a clean, minimalist aesthetic of futurity that contrasts sharply with *Blade Runner*'s cluttered postmodern pastiche. The 1992 director's cut, to which I have been referring throughout this chapter, removes both these elements, implies more strongly that Deckard is a replicant, and leaves greater irresolution around the question of whether or not he and Rachael escape Los Angeles. Yet another version of the film, *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, was released on DVD and Blu-ray disc in December 2007 as part of a five-disc "Ultimate Collector's Edition."[56] The DVD was issued in conjunction with a limited theatrical release in honor of the film's twenty-fifth anniversary.

The existence of so many proliferating *Blade Runners*—domestic cut, director's cut, various cuts created for television and foreign markets, and final cut, and versions released on film, VHS, laserdisc, DVD, and Blu-ray disc—might compel some to make a choice, that is, to decide which *Blade Runner* constitutes the best or most authentic one. It has led some to contrast the version that is contaminated with Kubrick's footage to Scott's pure versions, and others to issue reminders that *Blade Runner*'s own aesthetic is predicated on pastiche and hybridity. It has compelled some to dismiss Ford's voice-over as a reductive, unifying marker of interiority, and others to observe that the voice-over complicates the film's temporality at the same time as it clarifies its narrative progress. If we are to take the auteur's word on the question of authenticity, it is not the original, nor even the first

director's cut, but rather the belated "final cut" of the film that is the most genuine. Which, then, is the authentic film, and which the imposter? And why should we choose? *Blade Runner*'s multiple variations might constitute a testament to the powers of the false, and to the notion of a simulacral alterity that defines and permeates every supposed original.

Another image presented itself,
one that no longer belonged to me.
—WIM WENDERS, *Tokyo-Ga*

4 THE GREAT WALL

In the previous chapter, I suggested that anxiety over Chinese counterfeit goods maps "false copy" onto the East and "authentic original" onto the West. A more common binary opposition, however, opposes the West's inauthentic, falsified images of the East on the one hand, to authentic, indigenous images on the other. The inversion does little to improve the situation, as it tends to leave us stranded between Western orientalism and a notion of Eastern authenticity that is in many ways equally problematic. The four films that I will discuss in this chapter—*Chung Kuo: Cina* (Antonioni, 1972), *Adynata* (Thornton, 1983), *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (Wenders, 1989), and *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (Ottinger, 1989)—all work in different ways to question and undo the association of the East with simple, native truth and the West with semiotic multivalence. They do so through the use of narrative modes and formal techniques that blur the distinction between fiction and documentary and that question the very premise of a truthful representation. They all frequently call attention to the complicated ways that cinematic images signify beyond their function as indexical records. At the same time, these films stop short of proclaiming the impossibility of cross-cultural representation, a feature that makes them difficult to interpret and at times apparently self-contradictory.

What seems to be at stake in all of these films is the problem of how to represent an other in a way that does not presume to uncover an authentic essence, but that also does not rob that other of reality. I use

the word "rob" deliberately here, because it seems to me that questions of ownership and self-possession are to some extent inseparable from the problem of cross-cultural representation. As I discuss in the previous two chapters, anxieties about Asian appropriation of Western property and identity take many forms: the fear of being "shanghaied" and the projection of this fear onto mysterious Eastern objects, the association of hoarding public resources with China and Chinatowns rather than with corporate moguls, and phobic attempts to reinscribe difference and authenticity in the face of indistinguishable copies. The films that I discuss in this chapter, beginning with *Chung Kuo: Cina*, attempt in various ways to imagine the relationship between East and West in less proprietary terms, and to think about types of images, objects, and property that do not unequivocally "belong" to one culture or another.

PERFORMING NATIONAL IDENTITY *Chung Kuo: Cina*

Michelangelo Antonioni was invited by the Chinese government to make the documentary film *Chung Kuo: Cina* at a time when Communist China was only beginning to open its doors to visitors from the rest of the world. The 220-minute version of the film is organized into three sections: Beijing, Hunan Province including Suzhou and Nanjing, and Shanghai. In turn, each of the three sections is loosely organized into segments documenting various aspects of daily life: factory work, agriculture, the marketplace, leisure activities, and so on. These segments are organized thematically, but they also unfold loosely under the rubric of a day's activities, in a way reminiscent of Dziga Vertov's *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) and the genre of the city symphony. One of the first sequences in the film depicts a Caesarian section operation being performed in a clinic where the doctors use acupuncture for anesthetic; the woman giving birth appears to be in no pain. The sequence seems designed to illustrate the effectiveness of traditional Chinese medicinal practices while also highlighting their role in the new, modern China. This sequence appears to reference Vertov's film quite directly, for *The Man with a Movie Camera* uses imagery of a woman in labor to invoke life cycles of birth and death and to analogize them to a notion of a politically revolutionary rebirth. Antonioni loosely invokes and follows the temporal structure of a human life at certain points in the film. Some early scenes show

children in a school, and the film's penultimate scenes in Shanghai focus on images of the elderly among architectural remnants of that city's past.

Throughout *Chung Kuo: Cina*, Antonioni emphasizes the underlying revolutionary character of all the activities he films. As a worker in a textile factory comments, "If we make one more spool of thread, we have aided the world revolution." Antonioni creates visual similes that link the disparate spheres he films: associative matches reveal points of connection among industry, agriculture, the military, education, and leisure. In one scene from the Beijing section, a group of farmers march to the fields with their shovels held over their shoulders as if they were rifles. The farmer is just as important as the soldier, this image seems to say, since all are workers, and all are equally revolutionary. Antonioni refers to this principle as the "vertex" of workers, farmers, and soldiers. Shortly thereafter, Antonioni lingers over an image of ducks being fed assembly-line style, and this image forms a visual simile with the previous footage of factory workers making cotton thread. Farming and manufacturing, this graphic match seems to say, are likewise equally important. The camera's cut to a marketplace full of row upon row of produce, live animals, and fish, which also mirror the assembly-line form, brings consumption into the chain. "We hid our camera behind stacks of tea," Antonioni remarks, referencing the tight controls that the Chinese government placed upon his crew's filming activities. He notes that the abundance of food in the Beijing market "counteracts the denutrition in remote places."

The segments of *Chung Kuo: Cina* that treat "leisure" in Beijing focus primarily on state-sponsored cultural activities, most of which seem designed to promote a revolutionary political consciousness. Antonioni films a puppet show set to the Chinese national anthem. A visit to a museum reveals a "revolutionary crèche" depicting a Ming dynasty struggle in the sixteenth century, reinterpreted and captioned in the museum as a precursor to Communist uprising. Antonioni films the diorama in close-up, panning and cutting on the figurines to dynamize them into a narrative. He films a discussion session among workers at the factory compound who have gathered into groups to debate the possible political interpretations of the museum exhibit. Among this set of "leisure" images, Antonioni inserts footage of the Great Wall of China. In a rare moment of editorializing voice-over

commentary, Antonioni tells us that although this wall was originally built to keep out intruders from the north, it also had the effect of blocking winds. Thus, Antonioni says, a military structure inadvertently created newly farmable land and led to development along its corridor; a wall designed to keep "us" separate from "them" ended up producing new generative possibilities. His narration highlights contingency over intentionality. The word "contingency" also describes Antonioni's own mode of filmmaking with its open-framed, wandering camera style. In this segment of *Chung Kuo: Cina* Antonioni's camera traces a wavering, unsteady line across and around the Great Wall, as if it were responding to it rather than documenting it.[1]

The inclusion of these images of the Great Wall alongside those of the patriotic puppet show and the state-sponsored history museum marks them as Communist propaganda: these are the things that Antonioni's crew have officially received permission and encouragement to film. As Antonioni stated in an interview in 1974, "What I want to say is that everything I did in China was done in complete accord with the people who were there to accompany me. Usually there were eight of them. In Nanking there were fourteen. Thus I never did anything that wasn't allowed and I never shot anything without their being present."[2] From the start, these images thus also participate in a particular structure of address. They are messages from the Chinese government intended to be viewed by an audience of foreigners. In addition, the images Antonioni was permitted to film fall under the heading of spectacle—specifically, of things that have already been indexed as visually interesting. As Janet Bergstrom says, speaking of Ulrike Ottinger's film *China: The Arts—Everyday Life*, "What we see is already on display."[3] Since so much of what Antonioni films has already been run through the mill of government censorship, and is already marked as "to be looked at," the film reads at times like a carefully composed Chinese self-portrait. Frequent, often lengthy scenes depicting performances lend further credence to this idea. Antonioni films reel after reel of performing school children, some wearing red flowers and red school ties as they sing and dance to Communist songs and show off their athletic skills for the camera. The national identity that we see in Antonioni's film is a performative one, not an essence.

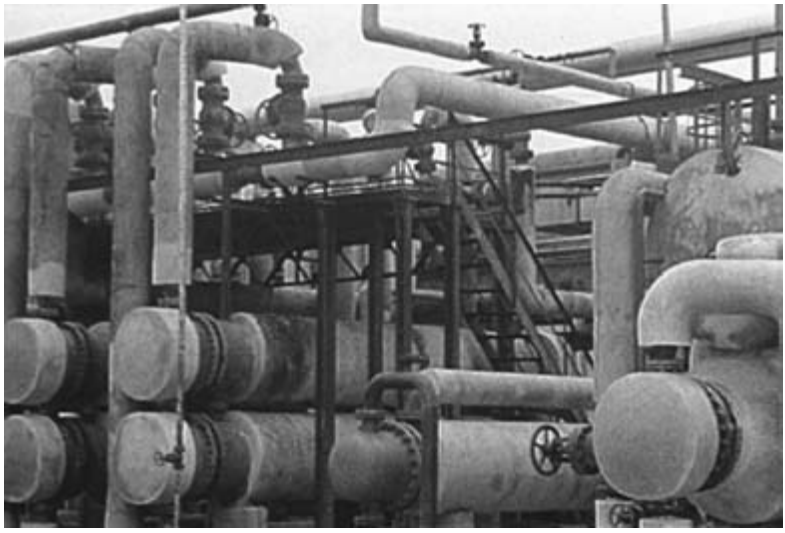
Chung Kuo: Cina ends with a long sequence documenting a performance by Chinese acrobats at a circus. A grand finale of sorts, the acrobat sequence begins with footage of an audience filling the theater,

followed by a show featuring plate spinning, juggling, tightrope walking, and other gymnastic acts. Antonioni shoots the performance in long takes, alternately in a wide frame that includes the whole of the stage with its proscenium arch, and in close-ups that focus on the faces of the acrobats with their red and white makeup. This sequence, which arrives at the end of the nearly four-hour-long film, is of exceptionally lengthy duration. The circus appears perpetually to be on the verge of concluding, only to proceed to another act. We are watching a recording of a theatrical performance that appears to have been conceived that way from the start. The acrobat sequence thus retroactively codes the entire film in this manner, as a recording of a series of performances and displays rather than as a "documentary" per se.

These images of Chinese political, social, and cultural achievement fall under the heading of enigmatic signifiers; that is, they are attempts to represent the self to an external other. Like many such attempts, they ended up signifying in excess of, and at times at odds with, the government officials' intentions. Antonioni's own leftist politics originally identified him as a suitable candidate to represent China's revolutionary accomplishments to the rest of the world and then earned him the rare invitation from the Chinese government to film in that country. His cinematic references to Vertov seem to honor the spirit of this invitation. However, as Umberto Eco notes in "De Interpretatione, or the Difficulty of Being Marco Polo," the Chinese received the finished film poorly and regarded it as a breach of trust.[4] In one example of how the film missed its mark, in a scene filmed at a refinery and its surrounding industrial buildings on the outskirts of Shanghai, Antonioni remarks in voice-over that the factories appear to be "hastily constructed by hand" and made of "discarded materials." Chinese officials viewed this statement, understandably, as a denunciation of their country's poverty rather than as praise for their innovations with salvaged materials. In another instance, representatives of China found that Antonioni had filmed a bridge in an unsatisfactory way, such that it appeared insufficiently grand.[5] The director was vilified by the Chinese government, which for a month in 1973 instituted daily "criticism sessions" in which those who had seen the film (and some who had not) deconstructed its depiction of China.

Chung Kuo: Cina in fact seems to anticipate this perhaps inevitable misunderstanding upon its reception, and it demonstrates an awareness of the likelihood that it would be perceived as politically amiss.

Performing national identity: school children in *Chung Kuo: Cina*.
(Buena Vista Home Entertainment)



Aesthetic possibilities: a refinery outside Shanghai in *Chung Kuo: Cina*.
(Buena Vista Home Entertainment)

First, as I describe above, Antonioni consistently draws attention to the acts of putting on display that have preceded his "discovery" of these images. The film seems to indicate that the pictures are neither false nor authentic as pertains to China; rather, they constitute a genuine record of things that have been conceived from the start as a visual message to the rest of the world. As Antonioni puts it, "The singing children in the houses, and all the rest of the 'representation' are obviously images that the Chinese wished to provide, but are not images forced upon the reality of the country." Second, as noted above, Antonioni highlights contingency as a category over and against intentionality, and this emphasis seems to anticipate his own lack of control, as well as the Chinese government's, over how the film would be received. In the story of Chinese history and development that he has been charged with telling, Antonioni injects accounts of the fortuitous. In the film's formal presentation, he emphasizes accident through the use of a wandering, intermittent visual style. Antonioni looks everywhere for aesthetic possibilities and eagerly pursues them with his camera, from the curve of pipes and smokestacks at the Shanghai refinery made of recycled parts to statues in a temple in Suzhou that, under the new regime, are presented as artifacts of a bygone era of religious superstition. Antonioni anthropomorphizes these figures with close-ups on their faces, noting that "it's hard to believe that religious feelings have really vanished."

Finally, Antonioni turns the tables, if not the camera, on himself, occasionally describing how he and his crew became objects of visual scrutiny for the people they filmed. When they arrive in Hunan Province, the crew members note its difference from the urban center of Beijing. As Antonioni says in voice-over, "We realize that we are the foreigners . . . It is a blow to our European pride . . . we face a gallery of amazed faces." This sequence shows dozens of passers-by, many of whom look directly into the camera with curiosity and a touch of apprehension, and a young boy who hides behind a door and peeks out at the crew. In the Suzhou section of the film, Antonioni also analogizes himself to Marco Polo, noting that his predecessor was "surprised at the level of civilization" he encountered in China, which included "paper money, silk brocade, and stone bridges high enough for two ships to pass." Antonioni's own affect of surprise mirrors that of the explorer. He notes that the city reminds him of Venice, and, during a lengthy restaurant scene in which fettuccini-style noodles

figure prominently, he says that "it isn't easy to accept that the Chinese invented it all." These images lend an additional valence to Antonioni's statement that "we are the foreigners." Not only are he and his crew strangers in China; Italy is also foreign to itself, since some of the things that are most quintessentially Italian have come from elsewhere.

The section on Shanghai that concludes *Chung Kuo: Cina* is in many ways the most complex of the film. Antonioni employs his greatest variety of formal modes here: informational presentation, commentaryless wandering, and in one scene, reenactment. In Shanghai, Antonioni visits the legendary brick building where the Chinese Communist Party originated, and he tells the story of the watershed political event that occurred there in 1921.[6] As the story goes, twelve men were in the midst of plotting revolution in the house when they were interrupted by a French spy. Although they managed to flee without being caught, they left their twelve teacups on the table and thus indicated how many they numbered. Only Mao Zedong, though, was remembered as a hero; the other men were forgotten by history. As Antonioni relates a version of this story in voice-over, the camera enters and stalks the empty room in a mobile shot, adopting the role and perspective of the French spy. By reenacting this narrative of origins from the point of view of the Western outsider, Antonioni calls attention to the function of surveillance in the constitution of Communist China and, in particular, the role of the other's look in producing this new image.[7] He also thereby points out the similarity between his own position and that of the French spy, as if to say that it is not surprising that his look would be treated with suspicion.

In the course of his voice-over, Antonioni remarks that "Shanghai was literally invented as a city by the foreign capital in the nineteenth century." Ackbar Abbas in his essay "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions" also provides a reminder that the modern cities of Shanghai and Hong Kong "were essentially created by western colonialism in the aftermath of the Opium Wars: Shanghai as a lucrative treaty port and Hong Kong as a British colony and staging post for trade with China."[8] When critics of twentieth-century mass visual culture claim that the Orient is the product of a Western imagination, it is important to note that this statement resonates in two ways. Not only is a city like Shanghai layered with the visual residues of fantasy projections in the Western cultural imaginary, but it was also created politically and

economically by outsiders in its twentieth-century form as a city divided into foreign concessions, as a political entity governed by extraterritoriality laws, as a port controlled by remote interests, and as an architectural space characterized by a pastiche of elements from a whole range of incongruous cultures, styles, and eras. In describing the Shanghai of the 1920s and 1930s, Abbas writes that it was a city of "multivalence . . . a polycentric, decentered city controlled by many different hands."[9] Far from being lawless, Abbas continues, "the space of Shanghai was subject to constant negotiations, and every initiative was observed from multiple perspectives."[10]

Traces of this older Shanghai are visible in the 1972 perspective offered by Antonioni's film. *Chung Kuo: Cina* captures the city's internal contradictions in images like those of ships in the city's harbor. Antonioni's montage of still and panning images reveals that some of these ships are military vessels, some enormous modern cargo ships, some small fishing boats, and some wooden apparitions with tall masts and large black sails that almost appear to have sailed out of a different century. Another image of internal discontinuity and temporal disjunction is provided by Antonioni's footage of abandoned huts in a ghetto where the Chinese were made to live during the Japanese war and occupation of Shanghai. Like these huts, the elderly Shanghai residents that Antonioni silently films in a teahouse sound a note of trauma that is discordant with the images of revolutionary rebirth and triumph.

In *Chung Kuo: Cina* the image of the Great Wall of China, built in the third century BC to protect China from Mongolia, serves as a symbol of the new China projected out as a message to spectators all over the world, many of whom, due to China's long closure, were viewing recent images of the country for the very first time. As an emblem of China it draws a line of continuity between that country's imperial past and its new, revolutionary future. As a wall it provides the surface for a long series of projections, both from inside and outside the nation. Its presence in Antonioni's film along with that of the Forbidden City, at the time newly open to the public, also references the political wall that for many years kept China closed off from the looks of outsiders and that would be shored up after the film's release when government officials attempted to exercise control over the film's reception and interpretation, both domestically and abroad. The

On display: acrobats in *Chung Kuo: Cina*.
(Buena Vista Home Entertainment)

phrase "Chinese wall," which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as "an insurmountable barrier (to understanding, etc.)" or "a prohibition against the passing of confidential information from one department . . . to another," references the legacy of this political walling off. The very existence of such a wall may trigger a paranoid curiosity or bolster the belief that there is confidential information to be discovered behind it. As Antonioni says near the end of *Chung Kuo: Cina*, "China is opening its doors, but is still mostly a remote and unknown land. We were only able to glance at it." The fact that China remains inaccessible even at the end of this film's four-hour-long glance, however, need not be understood as a failure. On the contrary, *Chung Kuo: Cina* helps us to imagine a practice of ethnography predicated on an aesthetic of surfaces rather than on the penetration and exposure of deep-lying secrets—some of which, as Laplanche might remind us, exist only in our own minds. Antonioni's documentary practice is surely not the only valid kind, as films documenting China's hidden human rights violations make clear. However, it is an equally necessary one. It is not so much that China is unrepresentable, Antonioni seems to say, as it is that one can only see what is there to see.

NO EMPIRE OF SIGNS *Adynata*

The title of Leslie Thornton's experimental film *Adynata* (1983) refers to a rhetorical trope meaning a declaration of impossibility, often the impossibility of expression itself. It can also take the form of a confession that words fail us, or "a stringing together of impossibilities."[11] The phrases "I'm speechless" or "Words cannot express" are familiar examples of this trope. Etymologically, *adynata* refers to a state of powerlessness: its Greek root words contain an analog of the phrase "without dynasty" (*a dynasthai*)—and as such we may hear in it an echo of China's imperial past. *Adynata*'s title thereby alerts us to the fact that the film will be in some way about the impossibility of representing the East and the power dynamics that have historically attended the circulation of orientalist images—although it is unclear at first how precisely the film will address these issues. Does the term *adynata* refer to the powerlessness of the East to represent itself, that is, to the West's usurpation of this privilege, per Edward Said's argument? Or is it the filmmaker's good-faith declaration of her own powerlessness to represent a place that differs so radically from her own, a confession that words and images fail her in the attempt to depict alterity? Or is it perhaps a caveat about the collection of images we are about to view, a warning that we are to read them as provisional signs rather than images that aspire to an accurate representation of the East?

While *Adynata* in fact supports all these possible readings, I would like to resist the temptation to read it simply as a comment on the impossibility of cross-cultural representation. As I mention above, it is sometimes tempting to set up a contrast between the West's fantastical, falsified version of the East on the one hand, and indigenous, vernacular Asian national cinemas on the other. To do so would be to situate Thornton's film as a kind of corrective to the former, but one that can never aspire to or compete with the latter and that might even be construed as eradicative of them. In *Chung Kuo: Cina* Antonioni began to find a way around these binary oppositions and their permutations by emphasizing the aspect of display and by showing how China's image of itself is not natural and innate but rather performative and constructed. The result is a film that is neither a false nor a true representation of China's essence but rather a genuine document of what Laplanche calls the "third reality of the message": of things that have already been imagined as representational and that have already been

addressed to an external audience. *Adynata* allows us to explore further how the very notions of authenticity and falseness, original and copy, have been mapped onto East and West in the cinematic imaginary. I ultimately read *Adynata* not simply as an avant-garde critique of the West's falsification of the East, where a declaration of the image's insufficiency suffices for political and ethical exoneration, but rather as a resistant film that churns through the material of orientalist fantasy without precisely negating it. *Adynata*'s ethical move, in other words, is not simply to condemn the inaccuracy or violence of orientalist representations but rather to work and deal in good faith with their enigmas, to think about their possible sources, and to problematize the very possibility of ever locating a core kernel of truth within them.

Adynata begins with shots of two faded photographs from a Chinese wedding circa 1861 and then proceeds to investigate images commonly associated with the East through an experimental collage of found footage, lush images of flower blossoms and silk fabrics, and restaged shots of Thornton posing as the husband and wife from the photograph, in the manner of (and anticipating by a few years) Cindy Sherman's *Film Stills.* In an avant-garde move, Thornton "detourns" each of these images. Exotic blossoms, slippers for bound feet, and the color red are presented with metaphorical quotation marks around them. But she also returns these images to sender. The flowers are not in Japan but rather in the Brooklyn Botanical Garden in New York; the music we hear on the soundtrack is not Chinese opera but rather a song from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific.* A degraded image of people running, which we might assume to be documentary footage from World War II, is in fact a distorted and reshot version of the final scene from François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960). An image of an official-looking man listening intently to speech on an audio headset is overlain with sinister-sounding Korean dialogue, evocative of intelligence gathering activities by the United States from military conflicts in the Pacific theater. But the dialogue is in fact benign chatter from the soundtrack of a Korean soap opera, and the image is taken from a 1950s science fiction film. Thomas Zummer has written that these images form "an abyss of technical reproductions and appropriations."[12] In writing about the Chinese wedding photograph, Linda Peckham suggests that "all of the imitations and inventions deriving from it suspend authenticity, obscure the distinction between copy and original, fact and fiction."[13]

The Chinese wedding photo: *Adynata*. (Image courtesy of the filmmaker)

In *Femmes Fatales* Mary Ann Doane suggests that these images are layered and saturated with signifying excess. As Doane puts it, "Readability is diminished through a surplus of codification."[14] The signs of the Orient are not assumed to be natural or primitive, as they traditionally are in orientalist discourse; rather, Thornton presents them as already semiotically burdened and fully worked over by culture. In Doane's words, *Adynata* reveals "the absurdity of the Western desire to grasp . . . the Orient through representation, by creating an image of the Orient that flaunts its own inadequacy."[15] The film's Brechtian distanciation techniques—the use of self-conscious masquerade, slow-motion, refilming, a jarring soundtrack, and other similar devices—work to render the images suspect and to expose them as quotation, projection, and the product of Western fantasy. These images leave no doubt in the spectator's mind that they are representational rather than real. Thornton's use of appropriated images works to create a similar effect. *Adynata*'s found and archival footage are not marked as separate from the original images; rather, they are rendered indistinguishable to an extent through Thornton's serial form of montage,

Masquerade: Leslie Thornton in *Adynata*. (Image courtesy of the filmmaker)

which relies on associative matches rather than on the rules of discursive continuity. If the Truffaut clip and the Korean soap opera are "pirated," Thornton seems to say, then so are the seemingly original images of Thornton herself masquerading in a Chinese wedding costume, and so are the seemingly natural lotus-blossom images from the botanical garden. Ultimately, we must view even the original wedding photograph with some of the same skepticism with which we view the more obviously constructed images. Everything we see has been appropriated in some way; everything comes packaged with a healthy dose of representational uncertainty.

However, as I suggested earlier, *Adynata* does more than simply reveal the falseness of orientalist imagery, and more than simply raise warning flags about the unreliability of representations in general. One could argue that *Adynata* is a film that reflects upon the notion of mimetic and iconic signs, or signs based on resemblance, and their association with the Far East, as we have seen in Sergei Eisenstein's writings on Japan. The Brechtian-style alienation effects that Thornton employs—techniques conveying the message that these images are "just signs"—is to some extent undone by the film's visual sump-

tuousness. These images have an almost tactile quality. They are rendered with all the immediacy and hyperpresence that cinema is capable of offering. Despite its semiotic layers, *Adynata* presents these objects not as thin, denuded signifiers, as one might expect in a film critical of orientalism, but rather as richly saturated, colorful, sensual, and visually pleasurable.

Adynata's floral imagery, draping silk fabrics and embroidery, and even the photograph of the Chinese wedding, which is reshot in aura-bestowing close-ups, thus seem to risk reproducing the very exoticism and fetishization of the East that they purport to deconstruct, the same exoticism that guests encountered in the simulacral world of Grauman's Chinese theater. However, by taking this risk Thornton enables another kind of critique. With its sumptuous imagery, *Adynata* provides a reminder that if the bound foot is a primitive, mimetic imitation of nature lacking in Western rationality, then so is the medium of film itself, to the extent that the West embraces its lure. And if one believes that Western words and images fail to express the Orient, as the film's title initially leads one to believe, then one ought to consider the possibility that those words and images are less purely Western than originally presumed. That is, perhaps there is a kernel of alterity—or at least a set of intricate and lively fantasies that have crystallized around encounters with this alterity—that informs portions of the Western cinematic imaginary.

Adynata could be said to constitute an example of translation, in Jean Laplanche's unique sense of the term. In its Laplanchean meaning, translation involves a psychical attempt to bind the traumatic affect and anxiety of not knowing associated with the enigmatic signifier by positing a series of meanings for it. These meanings are accumulative. They layer one upon the other and exist in relation to each other rather than in relation to an original. Laplanche's commentator John Fletcher explains that this activity is not an attempt to recover an original repressed memory: it does not go off "in the pursuit of 'determinate contents . . . which can ultimately be tracked down' . . . [as in] the final moment of total recall beloved of the flashback melodrama (Hitchcock's *Spellbound* or *Marnie*)."[16] In Laplanche's model, there is no original to uncover. There is no mnemic analog for the causal traumatic event or mystery, like the sledding accident in *Spellbound* or the young Marnie's murder of a sailor in *Marnie*. To Fletcher's Hitchcock examples we could add the traumatic events that occurred in

Chinatown that Jake is compelled to repeat, or the traumatic past in Shanghai that has marked Elsa with a black hole of alterity. As Laplanche explains in an interview with Cathy Caruth, "Translation means that there is no factual situation that can be translated. If something is translated, it's already a message. That means, you can only translate what has already been put in communication, or made as a communication."[17]

Laplanche occasionally uses the term "de-translation" interchangeably with translation. Fletcher helps us to understand the implications of the addition of the prefix *de-* when he describes it as "a work of dismantling and unbinding of existing translations."[18] Old translations, sedimented over time, can come to function as walls and defenses against the anxiety of unknowing constantly posed by the internal enigma. De-translation thus involves two steps. First, there must be a deconstruction of these old, counterproductive attempts to unravel the enigma. Only after these meanings have been taken apart can their pieces be recombined and others added to them to create new translations. De-translation thus consists of a double movement—first, a deconstruction and unbinding of old analogs, and second, their recombination with new ones that add to the growing collection. In this definition of psychical translation, the new translations thus exist side by side with the old ones. As Fletcher continues: "What is lost is not, then, a fully formed ur-text that could function as a ground or indisputable origin . . . The aim . . . is to include in the new translation what has been discarded or repressed in the 'original.'"[19]

The dismantling of existing translations constitutes an unbinding or taking apart, which in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud characterizes as the work of the death drive, "to restore an earlier state of things."[20] In elaborating on this aspect of the process Laplanche calls it an "antihermeneutic," a system for undoing interpretations. But a movement of inclusion accompanies this work, a rebinding of the discarded pieces that have been rejected or marked as other in the prior, "original" translations (which, as we have already established, are not actually "originals" in the sense we normally think of). This type of work falls under the auspices of the erotic drives, which Freud characterizes as having a uniting function of binding or "hold[ing] all the cells together."[21] When we de-translate, we both introduce new splits in things that were previously thought to be whole and expose new relations among things that were previously thought to be distinct. It

is a process for accommodating the internal alterity of the enigmatic signifier by steps and exposing the strangeness of both old and new.

Laplanche's notion of de-translation provides a useful metaphor for describing the complex path whereby we attempt to understand what is new, strange, or seemingly illegible. This metaphor can also help us to think about other kinds of translations: from one linguistic system to another, from one cultural paradigm to another, and from one textual medium, aesthetic mode, or genre to another. As Laplanche explains, "When I use this term [translation], it is a linguistic metaphor, in the sense that Jakobson speaks of translation. Which means not only verbal, linguistic translation, but also inter-semiotic translation, that is, from one type of language to another."[22] Thornton's *Adynata* seems to be engaged with this notion of translation. The film's project is to deconstruct images of a fictive Orient, but Thornton seems to recognize that in order to do so she must participate in this chain of signifiers and add new ones to it. She cannot step fully outside of it, nor can she eradicate it by positing in its stead an authentic original.

In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to two more films about Western encounters with and attempts to represent the East, Wim Wenders's *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* and Ulrike Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. Both films are by German directors and both were released in 1989. However, these coincidences of time and national origin are not the only reasons to look at the two films side by side. As I have suggested above, the binary oppositions between fiction and documentary, and between false copies and authentic originals, often map imperceptibly onto imaginary geographies of East and West. All of the filmmakers I discuss in this chapter work at various points along the border between fiction and documentary, and all of them refuse to take up a clear position on the question of whether their works are genuinely "about" the Eastern locations they represent. This refusal can be frustrating at times, but it seems to result from honest attempts to grapple with the thorny problems inherent to cross-cultural representation. Antonioni solves this problem by asserting the facticity of the images he was given to film, in spite of the fact that these images were to a large degree choreographed and selected by others. Thornton, as I have suggested, casts representational suspicion on each image in her film while simultaneously emphasizing their sensory fullness. In the sections that follow, I suggest that Wenders and Ottinger

each offer their own solutions to this problem. Wenders creates a portrait of the fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto that encourages us to think about how identity comes to us from others. Ottinger, in turn, draws upon the conventions of narrative film and ethnography to let the spectatorial modes suggested by each inform the other.

YAMAMOTO'S JACKET *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*

Wim Wenders's *Tokyo-Ga* (1985) documents the travels of the German filmmaker in Japan during a trip he made in spring 1983. Initially, Wenders sets out to research and pay homage to Yasujiro Ozu, his hero and role model in the art of filmmaking. But Wenders soon becomes entranced by the Japanese landscape and culture as a whole: he films Pachinko parlors, indoor golf ranges, and a factory where artificial plastic foods are produced. Part essay, part travelogue, *Tokyo-Ga* is narrated from multiple narrative and psychical positions.[23] Wenders speaks to us in voice-over, sounding by turns like a pilgrim, tourist, film historian, and poet-philosopher. In one scene he applies the researcher's detached gaze to hold forth on the conventions of Japanese athletics; in another he professes the depth of his love for the work of Yuuharu Atsuta, Ozu's cinematographer. In one scene, Wenders happens upon a group of Japanese teenagers in styles of dress from the 1950s: poodle skirts, black leather, slicked hair, and high ponytails. They Lindy Hop around the public park as the music of Elvis Presley plays from a boom box. Wenders's camera lingers on this scene, seeming to marvel at the emergence of the West into the East, and of the past into the present, in such an unexpected and vital form. The dancers are not presented as foreign copycats mimicking and pirating a superior American ideal. Rather, their rockabilly masks are donned with all the self-consciousness of Kabuki actors. We might say that they do not transcribe 1950s America but instead "de-translate" it, an act that in this case involves both a geographical transposition and a temporal one.

Nora Alter in her reading of *Tokyo-Ga* suggests that while Wenders seems to bemoan the image's fall into simulacrum in postmodernity, his film in fact embraces this condition. I read Wenders's *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* (1989) in a similar light, and I would argue that Wenders's seeming distrust of the image abates yet further in the second film. Like *Tokyo-Ga*, *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* is an essay film

Rockabilly masks: dancers in *Tokyo-Ga*. (Criterion Collection)

made during a trip to Japan, and as with *Tokyo-Ga* the trip was motivated in part by Wenders's desire to document and portraitize one of his aesthetic heroes—in this case the fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto. Like the earlier film, *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* masquerades as a travelogue, but it is also a set of reflections about identity, the relation between self and other, and the qualities that make something feel strange or familiar. As Thomas Elsaesser notes, "The film is 'with' Yamamoto, rather than 'about' him."[24] Commissioned by the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* is filmed with three distinct types of cameras, a regular 35 millimeter film camera, a portable 35 millimeter film camera designed for reporters and limited to thirty-second reels, and a consumer-grade Hi8 video camera. The film's images include cityscapes of Tokyo and Paris, talking head–style interviews with Yamamoto, images of his team working in the studio in preparation for a Paris runway show, and casual footage of his interactions with Wenders, sometimes over a game of billiards. Throughout, Wenders offers occasional commentary in voice-over on the process of making the film, the ideas and memories it evoked for him, and the various connections, both practical and conceptual, between filmmaking and Yamamoto's work as a designer.

Notebook on Cities and Clothes begins with an image of electronic snow from a video monitor as text scrolls across the screen. Wenders reads this text aloud in voice-over: "Identity of a person, of a thing, of a place . . . What is it, identity? To know where you belong? To know your self-worth? To know who you are? How do you recognize identity? We live in the cities. The cities live in us . . . time passes. We move from one city to another, from one country to another. We change languages, we change habits, we change opinions, we change clothes, we change everything. Everything changes. And fast." These preliminary ruminations on the mutability of identity seem to belong to the genre of the essayistic diary or travelogue film. Wenders quickly moves to associate them with the technology of image production and circulation, as well as with the world of fashion design. The voice-over and scrolling text continue:

> Images above all change faster and faster and they have been multiplying at a hellish rate ever since the explosion that unleashed the electronic images, the very images which are now replacing photography. We have learned to trust the photographic image. Can we trust the electronic image? . . . With photography and then film it began to get complicated. The original was the negative. Without a print, it did not exist, just the opposite. Each copy was the original. But now, with the electronic image and soon the digital, there is no more negative and no more positive. The very notion of the original is obsolete. Everything is copy. All distinctions have become arbitrary. No wonder the idea of identity finds itself in such a feeble state. Identity is out, out of fashion . . . Identity and fashion, are the two contradictory?

Wenders's remarks about the proliferation of copied images may call to mind Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." His question about whether we can trust the electronic image evokes a legion of theorists who have either affirmed or denied the indexical relation between a photograph and its referent.[25] Wenders's voice-over also anticipates contemporary scholarship on the status and ontology of the digital image.[26] Finally, this text is reminiscent of *Blade Runner*, specifically of the fear that in the age of the simulacrum, identity will be rendered obsolete. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Rachael in fact gives explicit voice to this concern, revealing to Deckard her fear that she has merely been "stamped out like a bottle cap" and is "just representative of a type."[27] In the

film, she speaks these words while clinging to a photograph of herself as a child with her mother, the proof that she has a unique origin and history.

Wenders's opening text lays the ground for a meditation on questions of original and copy in the context of identity, fashion, international commerce, and creative exchange. In so doing, it also alerts spectators that the film will defy the conventions of the portrait genre. Rather than a testament to Yamamoto's identity as a unique, individual subject, or an inside view of the famous fashion designer, we will be viewing a series of loose notes that deconstruct the very notions of identity upon which the idea of a portrait is founded. In the monologue quoted above, Wenders invokes two meanings of "identity," both in the sense of individual particularity and identifying traits, and in the sense of continuous duration over time or ontological persistence. He opposes each of these to the rapid changes of fashion and technology. As soon becomes clear, in *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* identity also means "sameness" and is opposed to difference: of location, culture, language, or media form.

In the middle of the above-quoted voice-over, another image replaces that of snow and text: a view of an urban skyline seen through a car windshield. On the right-hand side of the frame, inside the car, there is a small video monitor displaying a similar view. This is a *mise-en-abyme* or "mirror construction," a form that enfolds and encloses like a Russian doll or Chinese box.[28] Mise-en-abyme structures at times reflect a desire to contain and control their contents by surrounding and framing them, thereby marking them as separate from the viewer. However, there are also examples of this type of structure where inside and outside, sameness and difference become wrapped together into a multilayered unity. The video monitor inside the car in *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* is just such an image. At first, we may think that the driver of the car is in Tokyo, for we see a giant sign on a building that reads "Sony," and as the voice-over continues, Wenders informs us that he has journeyed there to interview Yamamoto for the film. However, we soon glimpse what look like French architecture and road signs, thereby revealing that Wenders is in fact on an elevated highway that encircles Paris. The images on the monitor, which at first appear to duplicate those in the larger frame, show similar views, but they are taken from the circular highway that surrounds Tokyo. Here, Tokyo is inside Paris, both in the Sony sign that appears in its land-

Video within film: *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*.
(Anchor Bay Entertainment)

scape and in the image that appears on the monitor (which, it turns out, happens to be made by Sony), and both cities in turn are inside the circular highways that enfold them. France, too, appears "inside" Japan: in the shots that follow those of the circular highway we hear Parisian-sounding accordion music over a series of Tokyo cityscapes, including the Tokyo Tower, a replica of the Eiffel Tower. In these images, East and West are enfolded mutually and contiguously within the same frame.

In Wenders's account of the electronic image, video means that there is "no more negative and no more positive" and thus no longer any difference between copy and original, for "everything is copy." The split-screen device that Wenders employs in the shot of the two cities —a technique that he uses repeatedly in the film with various sizes of monitors and sometimes with more than one monitor in the image— renders all the levels of the frame equal. Wenders employs a lens with a split focal length so that the landscape outside the car and the one inside on the monitor remain equally in focus. Like the electronic image that nullifies the distinction between copy and original, this formal technique unites Tokyo and Paris, thereby rendering them momentarily indistinguishable. These images assert the equivalence and

the inextricability of their facets. They thus avoid the paranoid logic whereby the West is urged to exert constant vigilance against the false imitation that tries to pass itself off as the real thing.

Another image of mutual enfolding occurs in a sequence where Wenders films Yamamoto from an outdoor balcony in Paris. Yamamoto says, "People of my generation born in urban areas have this feeling of not belonging to any nation. I like this feeling." We cut from his face in profile to what appears to be a reverse shot of the city below; however, Wenders splices in Tokyo rather than Paris as the object of Yamamoto's look. The false eyeline match complements Yamamoto's remark by splicing two distant cities together. In a scene deleted from the final cut of the film, Wenders even puts Tokyo inside Australia. Using the same technique of the television monitor shot by the film camera, he shows images of Yamamoto on a small screen at the corner of the frame while filming an Australian desert below, seen through the window of an airplane. All the while, though, the existence of the various frames within frames and the mapping of space onto various film stocks preserve a sense of the differences among these regions, such that they never collapse completely into one another. *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* is a French and German coproduction with dialogue and voice-over in English, filmed primarily in Japan, by a German filmmaker with ties to the United States. The film's international production conditions thus mirror this model of enfolded difference, a model that characterizes much of global cinema today, albeit often in more corporatized forms.

Over images of a game of billiards, Wenders discusses clothing and explains why he chose Yamamoto as the subject for his film:

> I bought a shirt and a jacket. But with this shirt and this jacket it was different. From the beginning they were new and old at the same time. In the mirror, I saw me . . . more me than before, and I had the strangest sensation I was wearing the shirt itself and the jacket itself, and in them, I was myself. Who was he, what secret had he discovered, this Yamamoto? It came from further away, from deeper. This jacket reminded me of my childhood and of my father, as if the essence of this memory were tailored into it, not in the details; rather, woven into the cloth itself. The jacket was a direct translation of this feeling and expressed "father" better than words. What did Yamamoto know about me, about everybody?

There is much to be made of this extraordinary voice-over. In wearing Yamamoto's jacket Wenders feels that he "is himself," that the Japanese designer has somehow captured the essence of the German filmmaker's identity. The jacket and shirt express contradictory, uncanny sensations. They are both "new and old" at the same time, both profoundly intimate and conveying something "from far away." Wenders finds not only himself in this jacket but also his father. We seem to have here a version of an Oedipal narrative.[29] In writing of *Tokyo-Ga* Nora Alter suggests that Ozu also functioned as a paternal figure for Wenders: "Ozu had come to be seen as the 'father' of Japanese cinema, or even as the 'father' of cinema tout court. As a paternal figure, he could certainly provide a continuity of cinematic practice (which was so notably lacking) in post-World War II Germany. But then in the sensitive post-Nazi era, latching onto a figure of a Japanese 'father' had its own ideological problematics."[30] Like Ozu's films, Yamamoto's jacket becomes an ersatz emissary for the missing paternal figure, a complex move due to Japan's wartime alliance with Germany. Does the Japanese father figure provide a cross-cultural antidote to the Fatherland, or only a repetition of its nationalistic formation?

Wenders's use of the word "translation" in his voice-over helps us better to understand the transaction, as it stresses the acts of exchange and displacement that have occurred. The exchange is geographic as well as intergenerational (the jacket links Wenders to his father) and temporal (its fabric connects the present to the past, his childhood). Through these displacements, the structure of paternal legacy with which Wenders begins his recollection is de-Oedipalized (or "anoedipalized," to use Deleuze and Guattari's term from *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*). Through this series of conduits, the jacket from Japan becomes the unlikely emissary of distant memories from Europe. Wenders has located traces of his own paternal legacy in a place that would seem absolutely foreign to it, and this paternal memory resides not just in some coincidental detail of the ornament but rather "in the cloth itself." The Yamamoto jacket may serve as an antidote to the paranoid fears of piracy that dominate discussions of East-West trade and manufacturing relations, including contemporary discourse about image making and video distribution technologies.[31] Upon reflection, it becomes clear that fears about the control of aesthetic property are related to the paternal legacy: to notions of filiation and inheritance and to juridical claims of ownership. In a rejection of

the way that this legacy normally works, Wenders discovers that the object that relays his paternal history "better than words" is one that comes from elsewhere.

The jacket monologue deconstructs the psychical walls that are meant to keep alterity at bay. But it is still not completely free from the paranoia that frequently rears its head in relation to enigmatic signifiers. Who is this Yamamoto, Wenders wonders, and what secrets does he harbor? The monologue concludes with a projection of secret knowledge about the self that recalls the dynamics of the Laplanchean enigmatic signifier: "What did Yamamoto know about me, about everybody?" However, Wenders's attitude toward his subject undergoes a transformation throughout the course of the film. While the film continues to be structured by connections and parallels that Wenders finds between himself and Yamamoto, between filmmaking and clothing design, and between West and East, Wenders eventually abandons the questions he asks above. Rather than set off in hot pursuit of Yamamoto's secret, he explores the relations between self and other in a roving, sketch-like way.

The fact that *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* has not received a great deal of critical attention and is not considered among Wenders's best films may be attributable in part to its loose, wandering quality. The film feels inconclusive, technically unpolished, and even amateurish at times. The title informs us that the film is to be considered a "notebook" rather than a finished product: a draping garment, perhaps, rather than a tailored suit. The German title of the film, *Aufzeichnungen zu Kleidern und Städten*, likewise suggests the idea of "recordings" or "sketches." Wenders's *Tokyo-Ga* is subtitled "a filmed diary" (*Tagebuch*), indicating that it, too, partakes of an episodic, inconclusive structure. The notebook, which admits of rough impressions, questions, free associations, and speculations, is antithetical to the paranoid systems of investigation and data collection that the West frequently deploys in relation to its cultural others (be they geographically external or internal). Unlike the data mine, the notebook does not promise to reveal the ulterior motives of its subjects, nor does it aspire to a totality of information. Leslie Thornton comments upon the absurdity of this paranoid pursuit of knowledge in *Adynata* with her appropriated images of surveillance and intelligence-gathering scenarios.

The "loose" quality of *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* is also directly

related to Wenders's use of consumer-grade Hi8 video, which impacts the film formally with its degraded aesthetic, intimate and candid feel, and facilitation of long-take, mobile shots. In this film, video expresses a close, tactile relationship among the things it films, like the touch of a pencil on a sketchbook or that of hands on fabric. Wenders constantly reminds us of the small size of the Hi8 camera and its portability by revealing its viewfinder within other shots filmed with the Arriflex camera. In addition, he frequently shows us his own hands, often holding camera equipment, and those of Yamamoto's coworkers. He uses the video camera to point and connect rather than to take and capture. His camera draws lines of interest among the objects in Yamamoto's studio. Later, it zooms in on Yamamoto tracing his own signature on a sign, in a scene showing the opening of his shop, as if it were pointing toward the subject's hand. Thus, although in the opening voice-over Wenders questions the materiality of the electronic image and its tenuous link to reality, in practice he uses the video camera, not the film camera, in a way that insists on this link.[32]

Among the many points of commonality that Wenders locates between himself and Yamamoto—both filmmaking and clothing design are collaborative efforts, both rely on "cutting," and Wenders notes that his camera sounds "like a sewing machine"—perhaps the most striking is a favorite book that they share, August Sander's *Men of the Twentieth Century*. Yamamoto plays a guessing game with this collection of portraits of men in Weimar Germany in various styles of dress, speculating about the mens' professions from their attire. He tells Wenders that although he is sometimes wrong, it is striking to him that earlier in the century it was easier to divine a person's occupation from his style of dress. In contemporary times, he notes, clothing has become more homogenous. The idea that fashion has tended toward greater indeterminacy with the approach of the twenty-first century seems related to the topic of the copy and similitude: over how differences are to be maintained when they are not visually identifiable. Yamamoto seems not to mourn but to celebrate this trend. His own couture designs are inspired by practical workwear and utilitarian garments similar to those that appear in Sander's photographs.

There is a sense in which Yamamoto is already a "Western" designer, a sense that is confirmed by his interest in Sander and by the fact that his designs depart from the style of traditional Japanese garments. However, Yamamoto's guessing game might also prompt one to think

The materiality of the electronic image: *Notebook on Cities and Clothes.* (Anchor Bay Entertainment)

about how we are invited to read the signifiers of attire and the responses they may generate in general, which range from curiosity to fetishism, outrage, or fear. In *The Big Sleep*, Carmen Sternwood's oriental gown inspires suspicion in Philip Marlowe, and the oriental décor provokes in him a desire to strip it away in order to uncover the murderous truth that lies beneath its exotic and baffling veils. Initially, Wenders too believes that there is an answer to a riddle somewhere in the folds of Yamamoto's jacket, if only he can penetrate them deeply enough. Indeed, there is a way to read Yamamoto's guessing game as providing an answer to that riddle. If his jacket is obliquely inspired by Sander's photographs, then it is not so far-fetched for Wenders to find in it a trace of his German father—and a resolution to the Oedipal and historical dilemma whereby, for political reasons, that father must be located somewhere outside the German homeland. However, this tidy reading of the film belies its wandering, sketch-like structure and formal aesthetic. It makes Yamamoto and Japan vehicles for a direct return to Germany and a unified notion of national identity, a journey that the film explicitly eschews. While at some times *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* presents clothing as an enigmatic signifier to be decoded, at others it suggests that while Yamamoto's clothes reveal little, they

also do not purport to hide anything. In stark contrast to the orientalist décor and costuming that take on such freighted significance in films of the classical Hollywood era, Yamamoto's designs are minimal and largely unornamented. His simple garments drape the wearer in folds of fabric, often solid black. Is there such a thing as a cloak that does not inspire a fear of a secret lying beneath it? A veil that does not carry the suspicion that something is hidden behind it, or provoke a desire to tear it away? Wenders's portrait of Yamamoto seems to suggest as much. The garment production we glimpse in *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* may indeed be rare, as well as restricted to the most privileged artists and consumers.[33] But the film still offers a compelling metaphor: a set of images that help to reimagine the relationship between East and West not as a one-sided mimicry or appropriation but rather as a layered series of enfolded exchanges.

SIGN IN THE VOID *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*

Ulrike Ottinger's films teeter between fiction and documentary and between an attitude of knowing critical distance and one of seeming sincerity. This tension appears at first glance to map neatly onto her career, with the ironic pastiches of the early *Madame X: An Absolute Ruler* (1978), *Ticket of No Return* (1979), and *The Image of Dorian Gray in the Yellow Press* (1984) followed by the experimental ethnographic styles of such films as *China: The Arts—Everyday Life* (1986), *Taiga* (1992), and *Exile Shanghai* (1997). Laurence Rickels notes that shortly after the release of *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* (1989), critics hastened to mark a "'Before' and 'After'" point in Ottinger's career. But as Rickels implies, this gesture belies to some extent Ottinger's "dual—and in every film moment double—investment in fictional art cinema and documentary film."[34]

Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia, the film with which I conclude this chapter, marks a transition point between the two poles of this binary opposition. The film's two sections dramatize a clash between cultures and filmmaking styles. The first hour of the film introduces a group of Western travelers aboard the Trans-Siberian Railway. These characters, like many of their predecessors in Ottinger's oeuvre, seem to typify certain worldviews in an allegorical mode. The film takes a detour when, in a scene reminiscent of Joseph von Sternberg's *Shanghai Ex-*

press, the train is brought to a halt in the middle of the Gobi Desert by a nomadic tribe of Mongolians who have barricaded the tracks with sand. Led by the magnificent Princess Ulun Iga (Xu Re Huar), the Mongolians take the female travelers as hostages. The women then voluntarily remain with them to witness a peace accord with a warring tribe, which is followed by a celebratory summer festival with song and dance, feasting, recitations, and an archery competition. During this time, an intimate friendship is sparked between the princess and Giovanna (Inés Sastre), a young backpacker who is the Johanna of the film's title. The film's short coda returns us to the train, where we learn that the Mongolian princess in fact resides mainly in Paris. Dressed in a Chanel suit, she explains that she visits Mongolia in the summer months from time to time, "in order to preserve in some measure the illusion of free, nomadic life." The opening scenes of the film are shot with a high degree of artifice, including carefully composed framings and a mise-en-scène so anti-illusionistic that brush strokes are actually visible on the sets of the train station. The carnivalesque scenes in the desert, by contrast, appear to be filmed in a more "documentary" style, with distant framings that highlight the expansive location, long takes that emphasize observation rather than construction, and moments of silence and stillness.

An obvious point of entry for thinking about *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* is the question of how the two halves of the film relate to one another. Julia Knight suggests that the film establishes "parallels" between its two halves.[35] Brenda Longfellow in turn suggests that its binary oppositions—"fiction/documentary; artifice/authentic; west/east"—are not as rigid as they seem.[36] In the ostensibly fiction-driven first half of the film, aspects of documentary appear by proxy in the photographs that adorn the train's walls, and in the anthropological and historical data recited by Frau Mueller-Vohwinkel (Irm Hermann). In turn, "fiction" appears within the Mongolian scenes in the form of narrated tales and pantomimes, which Ottinger often films in a frontal presentation that emphasizes their theatricality. The artifice of the train segments complements the formal staging of the Mongolian sequences. The long takes and slow pans that dominate the second half of the film are reminiscent of Antonioni and other directors of the European New Wave. In a roundtable discussion with Ottinger, Mandy Merck notes stylistic similarities between Ottinger's first China

documentary and Antonioni's *Chung Kuo: Cina*. These stylistic choices invoke an aesthetic that, while indebted to neorealism and cinéma vérité, does not always assert the ontological character or facticity of its referents.[37]

As its multilingual title suggests, *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* is a film that reflects upon various modes of signification. Ottinger herself has suggested that the film is about "different kinds of narration."[38] The binary opposition that Ottinger is deconstructing is not simply that between a cultural West and a natural East, but also that between a semiotically sophisticated West and a semiotically primitive East. Like Roland Barthes and Leslie Thornton, Ottinger acknowledges that her Mongolia is an empire of signs, a construction rather than an essence.[39] Knight suggests that the film's coda reveals that "what the film persuaded us was 'authentic' is in a sense as artificial as the first part of the film . . . the whole film is revealed as an elaborate fiction."[40] However, an awareness of its own status as fiction, Ottinger seems to say, may be a useful first step but is not in itself sufficient. Ottinger's film is puzzling, for it seems simultaneously to declare the artifice of what it shows and its phenomenological, indexical reality. I would suggest that the film is finally about the challenges and possibilities of a world in which both concepts of the filmic signifier—seemingly mutually exclusive—are in play at the same time.

Many interpreters of Ottinger's films argue that their depictions of race are laced with irony and that they illustrate an openness to alterity that is tied to a feminist and queer appropriation of traditionally patriarchal visual pleasure.[41] Knight suggests that *Johanna* "represents difference while obliterating 'otherness.'"[42] Roswitha Mueller states that Ottinger's films express "an insistence on difference based on inclusiveness."[43] Others have suggested that the film does not so much critique as replicate colonialist narrative patterns of travel, exploration, and kidnapping, substituting for a fantasy of colonial dominance one of utopian matriarchy that is ultimately no less problematic.[44] Such readings are persuasive: indeed, Ottinger seems at times to justify the film's narrative premise by insisting on the Mongolians' complicity and agency in the representation, both at the level of production and within the film's diegesis, in a way that could be seen as glossing over what is in fact a one-sided history of Western imperialism. Still, an interpretation of Ottinger's work that considers the relation between

the two differing conceptions of the cinematic sign that inform these readings has the potential to reveal underlooked possibilities for thinking about alterity and representation. The key to such a reading is to consider the film's two sections as in dialogue with one another rather than as antitheses.

In the film's prologue, the four main women on the train are introduced one by one in short scenes that highlight their defining characteristics. Lady Windermere (Delphine Seyrig), a British ethnographer, serves throughout the film as a translator of both language and custom for the other women. She provides the opening voice-over, which is spoken over images of trees in a snowy tundra streaming past a train window. This segment immediately provides a clue that the film will be about signification. In relating a story of early Chinese travelers and merchants who ventured into Mongolia's "slumbering wilderness" Lady Windermere states, "With ingenious means they placed signs in the land of the void. An initial attempt to tame the wilderness with the aid of cultivated nature. They made clearings in the coniferous forests in the shape of huge written signs which they then planted with oaks. The written signs altered their colors with the changing seasons and could be seen from a great distance. The attempt to place a sign in the void, a mark . . . Here the fears of the travelers whom the wind otherwise carried unchecked across the endless green plains of the taiga, were allayed for a moment." The voice-over neither approves nor criticizes the travelers' signifying activity, only points to its desired purpose. The oak tree symbols parallel the function of the voice-over: they are both "signs placed in the void" that are intended to "allay fears" by indexing coordinates for their recipients. The temporal cues in this voice-over—an "initial" attempt, the alteration of the signs with the "changing seasons," the final "for a moment"—indicate that this process is temporary and does not divide neatly into a "before" and "after" of signification. During the voice-over, Ottinger's camera traces a path across the objects in Lady Windermere's car: a blue and white porcelain vase, an open trunk filled with clothing, a painting of the Madonna and child, a mask, a doll in antique Chinese military costume. They are likewise signs placed in a void; soon, some of these objects will be activated through exchange. The remainder of the voice-over indicates that the train is also a sign intended to insure against the anxiety of disorientation, a line that can be traced "as easily

as you can travel with your finger across the map." At this point, Ottinger's camera also traces a line, not through the tundra but instead back to where the shot began, with a medium close-up of Lady Windermere seated by the train window. This camera movement suggests that the film will partake of a less linear conception of space and time than does the railway.[45]

The next segments introduce Frau Mueller-Vohwinkel, a German teacher armed with a Baedeker's guide; Fanny Ziegfield (Gillian Scalici), an American Broadway musical actress; and Giovanna, a backpacker traveling second-class who represents youth culture. Mueller-Vohwinkel reads from her Baedeker's and sighs, "I know there are relevant facts behind all this greenness." There are framed photographs depicting the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway placed on the wall behind her. Her credit appears printed on a card, as do the others, in this case with a book behind it. It now becomes clear that Frau Mueller-Vohwinkel exemplifies the captioning, explanatory voice of the travel guide and of written language; when she looks out the window, she turns the landscape into an interpretable photograph like those on the wall behind her. Each woman, we now understand, is associated with a specific order of the signifier. The next sequence introduces Fanny Ziegfield: her mode of signification is song. She eats a wafer, noting that some printer's ink has transferred onto it from a newspaper wrapping. Her orality, it seems, is no less a part of the symbolic order than the written word. Giovanna appears next, lying in a berth listening to a Walkman. The camera pans by the other patrons in her second-class car: Mongolians in fur caps, Chinese soldiers, and women in headscarves. Asian string music plays over a garbled radio signal as the passengers sing along and livestock make noise in the background. Along with the Walkman, this soundtrack identifies Giovanna as a figure of listening and receiving. Together, she and Lady Windermere form the two mutually dependent points of focalization in the film, one the speaker and the other her diegetic addressee.

Lady Windermere, for her part, is identified with two different semiotic registers: verbal speech, as in her voice-over narration, and the language of objects, as indicated by the camera's panning over the items in her train compartment. She proves fluent in the latter, prompting her companions to offer gifts to the Mongolians when the train is stopped. Giovanna gives up her Walkman; Frau Mueller-Vohwinkel

later cedes her cutlery set. The Mongolian women appropriate the fork and spoon as aesthetic objects, using them as props in a dance: what was once a tool becomes a symbol. Likewise, when Frau Mueller-Vohwinkel later presses bills of currency onto the wall of a Lamanistic temple, the money is taken out of its usual economy and inducted into a different order of value. Such moments can be read in terms of what Gaylyn Studlar calls a "masochistic aesthetic." As I describe in chapter 2, this is a removal of the phallic term as arbiter or general equivalent of meaning that results in a free play of forms and values unmoored from their usual rubrics.[46] Longfellow suggests that the film as a whole participates in such an aesthetic with its "refusal of identification with a paternal order."[47] The establishment of this signifying cacophony early in the film, with the introductions of the women, primes us to think through its implications during the Mongolia half of the film.

In one scene on the train, the travelers are treated to a cabaret show by the Kalinka Sisters, a Yiddish singing trio who perform World War II–era standards. These cabaret numbers instruct us in how to read the Mongolian performances later on: as neither more nor less authentic cultural artifacts. The Kalinka Sisters' rendition of "Bei mir bist Du schoen" recalls the Andrews Sisters and references the film's own assortment of languages; the tenor Mickey Katz's rendition of "Toot, Toot, Tootsie Goodbye" references Al Jolson's performance in *The Jazz Singer* (1927) and its concomitant historical and political associations (as well as his namesake's membership in Spike Jones's band). We are meant to understand that the Mongolian epopees and dances have undergone analogous displacements and layerings of meaning, and that they are equally semiotically rich. In turn, the sincerity of Ottinger's camera encourages us to read the cabaret performances as more than pastiche or ironic citation. They have as much ontological and phenomenological weight as the Mongolian songs. We are meant to see each set of performances as neither fully ironic nor fully in earnest, as neither pure pastiche nor pure ethnography.

A similar effect is achieved with Mickey Katz's lavishly aestheticized Zakuska supper, a scene that forms a counterpart to a feast scene in the film's second half that begins with the slaughter of a sheep. The epic similes of Katz's monologue—"a rosebud wreath of turnips, a silver necklace of miniature onions, butter-lilies on a shimmering black pond of bread, iridescent peacocks' tails of leek stems encircling the white, shining tundra"—analogize the meal to ornament, landscape, and the

Eine echt russische Sakuska-Tafel (An authentic Russian Zakuska supper). Peter Kern et al.; Berlin, 1988. Context: *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. © Ulrike Ottinger

work of art. When the food finally appears, its centerpiece is a large taxidermy swan surrounded by a mosaic of snacks. The scene of the sheep slaughter and subsequent banquet likewise depicts the ritualized display of animal meat, accompanied by lyrical expression, in this case singing. The two scenes are filmed quite differently: Katz's dinner sequence is filmed in a master shot intercut with close-ups of Katz and reverse shots of the waiter, whereas the Mongolian scenes are filmed primarily from a static, nonembodied viewpoint with a few cuts to medium close-ups from the same angle. However, these differences are what allow the analogy its full force. The earlier scene instructs us in how the later one is to be read: not as raw, uncivilized barbarism but rather as an equally codified activity. In turn, and just as importantly, the slaughter scene retroactively informs its predecessor, thereby reasserting the materiality of flesh and land. The "white, shining tundra" of Katz's monologue is neither strictly linguistic fiction nor strictly material fact. Like the sign always already placed in the verdant expanse, it is both.

Das rituelle Mahl der mongolischen Prinzessin und ihrer Damen (The meal ritual of the Mongolian princess and her ladies). Yi Tuo Ya, Xu Re Huar, Saren Goawa, Naren Mandola, Alata; Inner Mongolia, 1988. Context: *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. © Ulrike Ottinger

Ottinger was the first foreign filmmaker to be granted permission to make a film in Mongolia; in this way, *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* could be said to exist in a similar relationship to that country as *Chung Kuo: Cina* does to China. With its layering of fact and fiction, its casting of nonprofessional actors, and its fusion of formal artifice with documentary naturalism, *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* could be seen, from a certain angle, to follow in the footsteps of Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966). In a move that corresponds to Gilles Deleuze's prescription for a new political cinema—"the storytelling of a people to come"—it puts fiction in the mouths of found subjects.[48] This technique has been revived in recent films such as *Mysterious Object at Noon* (Weerasethakul, 2000), a film that asks its participants to engage in a game of exquisite corpse, and *Madeinusa* (Llosa, 2006), a film that shares *Johanna*'s fairy tale–like enunciation and feminist concerns. A final binary opposition that such films deconstruct is that between fantasy and reality. These terms do not map neatly, à la *Wizard of Oz*,

onto the two sections, regions, and filmmaking styles of *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. If the space of the train is fantastic and virtualized, then so too is the space of the Gobi desert. And if the space of the Mongolian steppe has phenomenological gravity, then so too does the railway. Ottinger's insistence on this chiasmus makes *Johanna* less a way station on the road from fiction to documentary than a circuit for their endless interchange.

The strangeness comes from within oneself.
—XU BING, "Introduction to
New English Calligraphy"

5 THE LOST GIRLS

In the final chapter of this book I turn to two contemporary visual texts from 2003, Sophie Calle's multimedia installation *Exquisite Pain* (*La Douleur Exquise*) and Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation*. The first work is an installation piece by a French artist and the second is a feature-length narrative film by a United States director. The first piece was funded by artist's grants, the second by independent producers in Hollywood. The first work's audience is limited to those who would have seen the installation in an exhibition or in the published monograph version; the second had a long theatrical run and has been distributed worldwide in various formats. However, these two works share much beyond their creator's matching sets of initials and their year of origin. Both texts perform cultural work regarding issues of colonialism and imperialism, and they are implicitly in dialogue with the literary genres of the travelogue, the sentimental novel, and the captivity narrative. They are of a piece in their focus on the story of a young Western woman abroad in Japan for the first time, and in their depictions of the coping strategies each develops in the face of a traumatic encounter with otherness. In this chapter I call this figure the lost girl, and through Freud and Laplanche I endeavor to read her as a figure of cross-cultural exchange.

THE UNHAPPY WANDERER *Exquisite Pain*

In 1984, the French artist Sophie Calle was awarded a three-month grant to study in New York. But her familiarity with that place made

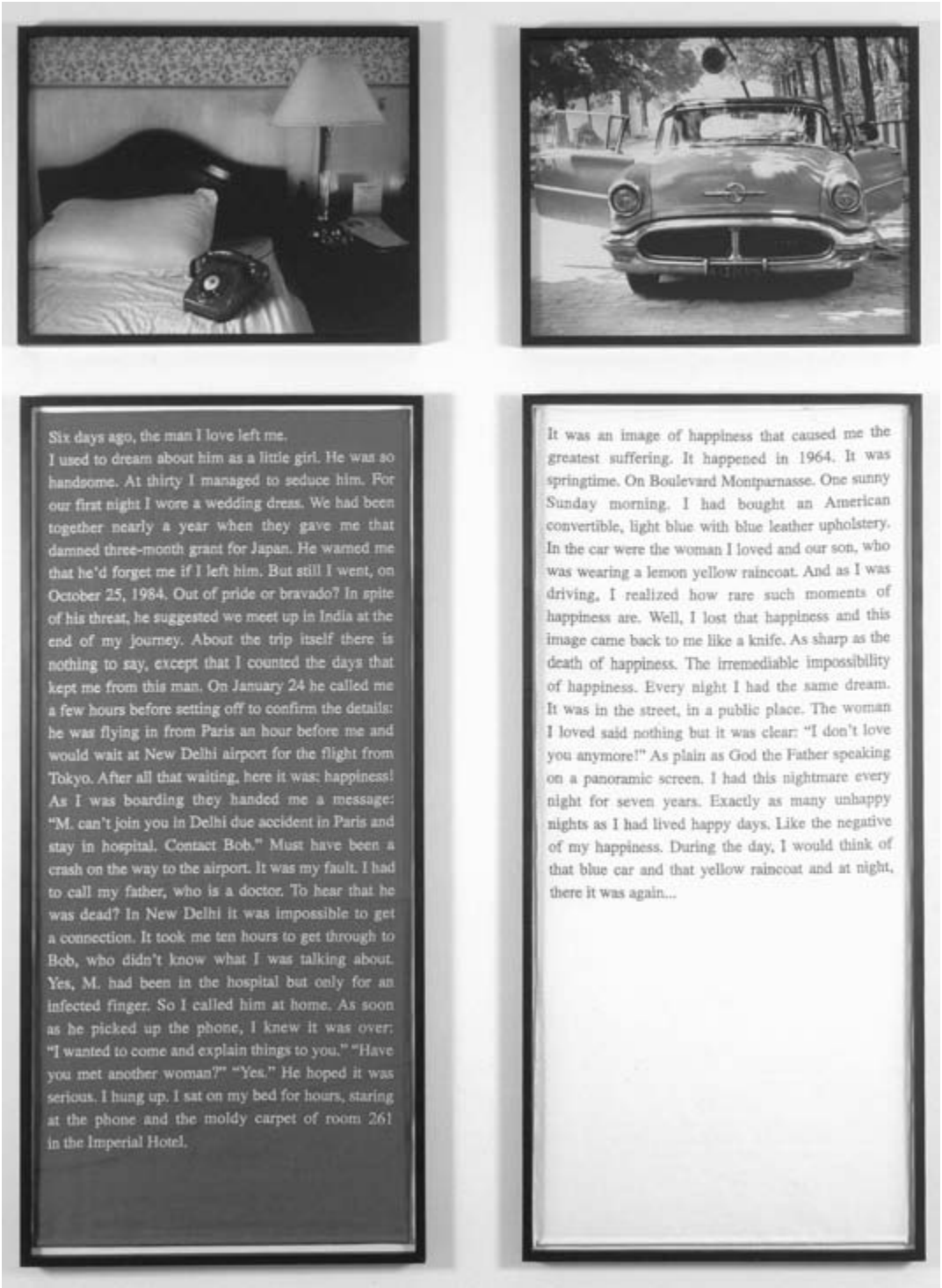
her feel guilty, so she decided to go to Japan instead—a place where she felt she might experience something different. "I would go someplace I did not want to visit," Calle writes, "because the experience would be more vivid."[1] Her travels were motivated by a conscious desire to create artistic products from the new experiences that they would offer. However, as she became filled with anxiety about the impending time abroad, Calle decided to shorten her stay by lengthening her journey. Instead of flying, she made the journey by the Trans-Siberian Railway, the same one featured in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*, shuttling across Europe, Russia, and China over a duration of three weeks. Once in Japan, Calle attempted to photograph and document her experiences, but she found herself mentally elsewhere while thinking about a lover she had left behind in France and writing letters to him nearly daily. During her final week in the East, this love affair came abruptly to an end when her lover did not show up for a reunion they had planned at a hotel in India. Thereafter, the trip became indistinguishable for Calle from the memory of the painful event that awaited her at its end. Indeed, she states that she came to blame the breakup on the trip itself.

Exquisite Pain documents this trip and its aftermath. The first half of *Exquisite Pain* is a travelogue of Calle's journey, in the form of photographs, text, and framed ephemera from her travels, presented as a ninety-two-day countdown to "unhappiness." Each day is counted off with a photo, image of writing, or souvenir object such as a train ticket or hotel bill, and each of these is stamped over in red ink with a number counting down the days to the impending loss. Some of the images are accompanied by an external caption or bit of text, sometimes an excerpt from a letter Calle has written to her lover. We see photographs of a Russian man with whom Calle attempted to communicate in sign language on the train to Vladivostok, Polaroids of Calle at various points in her journey, 35 millimeter photographs of temples and trees laden with written offerings and prayers, and images of Japanese foods and other touristy shots. The red ink stamps marshal each image into an apocalyptic narrative of anticipation. D-Day in this case takes place at two o'clock in the morning on 25 January 1985 in room 261 of the Imperial Hotel in New Delhi, where Calle learned via a telegram and a phone call that her lover had left her for another woman and would not be coming to their scheduled meeting there.

The second half of the piece takes the form of a series of diptychs of

cloth panels. On one panel, Calle shows a photograph of a red telephone on a hotel bed—room 261 of the Imperial Hotel—underneath which she embroiders a version of her story of loss. Each of these panels is paired with a second frame containing a photograph and a first-person account from individuals whom Calle asked to tell the story of when they had "suffered the most." There are ninety-nine such pairs of panels and each is captioned in red, counting forward the number of days that have passed since her lover left her, in a formal device that echoes the countdown of the previous half of the installation. As Calle repeats her own story and juxtaposes it over and over again with the stories of others, the white embroidered words on the cloth become increasingly faint, fading to gray and finally black, such that they are barely distinguishable from their background in the end. The stories by others remain vivid, black writing against a white background. We read about a beloved falling out of love shortly after the purchase of a new car, a brother committing suicide by jumping from a train, a mother's death and its association with the color green, the death of a father three days after the assassination of Kennedy, and a summer spent in Paris sitting in a chair and suffering for no apparent reason. The majority of these stories describe either lost loves or the moment of death or the funeral of a loved one. The accompanying images are often photographs of the site where the loss occurred or an associated landscape, but Calle also shows objects, color fields, and a couple of portraits.

With the addition of each new story, and with the accumulation of days separating her from the loss, Calle's own text grows fainter and more succinct. In some versions she muses about the beginning of her relationship; more often she focuses on the events of the break-up day itself. Her tone alters from self-pitying to self-deprecating, from an anger and sadness that seem almost hypothetical to a resigned clinical indifference. She provides a few additional details about her beloved. He was a friend of her father's to whom she had been attracted for a long time, and whom she had seduced when she was thirty years old. This portion of the piece could be described as Calle's attempt to bind the trauma by narrating it: the classic psychoanalytic strategy of the "talking cure" and a staple element of mourning. In Laplanche's terms, Calle is attempting to translate the enigma of her seduction and abandonment by supplying new signifiers, new versions of the story, and by linking them to other signifiers—namely, the narratives she has



Mourning by juxtaposing: day six of Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain*. (© Sophie Calle. Courtesy of the Paula Cooper Gallery, N.Y. Artists Rights Society [ARS], New York / ADAGP, Paris)

collected from others that are stitched together with her own in the installation. Calle tells us in a text box that her method was "radically effective" and that within three months she was "cured" of her loss.

Indeed, Calle's method might strike some as *too* effective. In a review of the installation at the Paula Cooper Gallery in 2005, Ken Johnson writes that Calle appears to "deal with her tempestuous emotions by diverting them into intellectualized programs," and that the most moving aspect of the work is "seeing how her head compulsively overrides her heart."[2] Calle tells us that although she was relieved of her suffering through this symbolizing process, she did not incorporate these materials into her artwork until fifteen years later. The long delay testifies to a resistance that the methodical, no-nonsense approach of the piece belies. Indeed, the temporality of the installation as a whole is curious. The countdown and then forward of days marshals the images into a relentless before and after structure—a traumatic temporality, inflected by what psychoanalytic theory calls *Nachträglichkeit*, "belatedness" or "afterwardness."[3] When her lover fails to show up, that is, Calle retroactively comprehends that she has been abandoned from the start. She rereads history through the lens of this loss. In addition, the beginning of her journey is marked by deferral and postponement. As mentioned above, Calle tells us she delayed her arrival in Japan by traveling slowly by train through Russia and China. Although she does not realize it at the time, what she thereby postpones is not simply Japan but also her loss.

The second half of the piece complicates the temporality even more. The installation seems to want to rush toward the time when the mourning will be completed, systematically ticking off the days that separate Calle from her trauma. Calle's story gets shorter and fainter with each step; there are no relapses, no waves of grief that ebb and return, no apparent setback or regression. The regimen for speed mourning is unswervingly goal oriented, in a way that inadvertently seems to end up speaking not to the success of such a program but instead to its madness or even impossibility. While Calle tells us that her method for getting over the loss was "radically effective," the initial three-week deferral and subsequent fifteen-year delay tell a different story about her suspicion that she will be abandoned at the beginning of the journey, and about a refusal to mourn at the end. Calle steers clear of the day of trauma at both ends, temporally speaking, despite the fact that

she confronts it head-on in her narrative and repetitiously narrates the feelings of suffering that followed the fateful telegram in the second half of the installation.

In reading these deferrals and rushes we get the sense that there is something else Calle is avoiding, a glimpse of an underlying anxiety that could not be bound and that in fact seems to motivate her tightly controlled approach to mourning. That is, the trip abroad is conspicuously and remarkably absent from the second half of *Exquisite Pain*. While Calle seems determined to confront her loss unflinchingly, she never again mentions her time in Japan except to curse the fact that she went there. It is as if Japan has been forgotten, its memory completely overshadowed by the loss that abruptly punctuated the journey's end and its landscapes blotted out by the repeated image of the culprit red telephone. In fact, one might even go so far as to say that the loss and subsequent obsession with it permits Calle to avoid the very experience she wanted and feared the most and the one that the trip was supposed to provide: a vivid encounter with otherness. It is not simply that the loss intervenes from nowhere and deprives her of the experience of Japan. Rather, there is an odd sense in which her preoccupation with the separation, impending reunion, and ultimately the break-up with her lover actually *allow* her to avoid this experience.

This is not to say that we should fault Calle for failing to be a sufficiently attentive and ethical tourist. One can imagine another version of this story, one not punctuated by loss, in which Calle immersed herself fully in Japanese culture and relished the experience, or in which the loss of her lover did not undo her to such an extent or lead her to curse the country that prefaced it. This new story might still operate under the sign of the enigmatic signifier, but it would neutralize its otherness through assimilation rather than tiptoeing around it. As it stands, the installation provides a document of another strategy—one of slightly phobic avoidance—and thus generously reveals a set of powerful psychical obstacles, common ones that are also to be found in literature, films, journalism, and everyday human interactions. Rather than simply critique Calle's strategy—the way her affect and mental energies become bound up with her lover rather than with Japan and ultimately cause her to reject it—there is much to be gained from closer scrutiny of this process and of another story that is not told directly in the installation.

That Calle's lover was a friend of her father's, older, and a man whom she had initially tried to seduce many years earlier when she was a teenager complicates the story significantly. It marks him explicitly as an Oedipal object; their love is coded as a familiar and familial one. The story of its end is thus as familiar and inevitable as the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. According to psychoanalytic wisdom, Oedipal love is of course not only familiar and "not foreign" but prototypical: a child's first love object is his or her mother, but he or she is prohibited by means of the castration complex; all subsequent love objects will be based upon this template. But there are ways in which Freud's story of the heterosexual female Oedipus complex is more "foreign" for the little girl than for the little boy, first to Freud himself, at the level of his own discourse, and later in terms of what he concludes regarding her developmental path. Feminist critics have analyzed in detail the wrenching maneuvers by which Freud attempts to account for female sexuality.[4] As Kaja Silverman notes, "The male subject . . . will find himself 'at home' in those discourses and institutions which define the current symbolic order . . . However, the female subject is obliged to renounce her first object choice, to effect a quite violent break with the source of her earliest pleasure . . . The ideological bases of the Oedipus complex become startlingly evident at this point in Freud's argument."[5]

Freud's late writings on the female Oedipus complex offer a textual goldmine for anyone who wishes to perform a symptomatic reading of them. His own journey abroad into the unknown terrain of female sexuality leads him from obscurity to clarity and back again. One question continued to pester Freud throughout these studies: if the mother forms the template of desire for both the little boy and the little girl, then male heterosexuality makes sense. But how and why would a little girl become heterosexual? In his essay "The Infantile Genital Organization of the Libido" (1923) Freud describes this process for the little boy, but he admits that the female version is still an enigma for him: "The corresponding processes in the little girl," he writes, "are not sufficiently known to us."[6] A year later in "The Passing of the Oedipus Complex" he writes that for the girl the Oedipus complex "is far simpler, less equivocal" than for the little boy, only to confess a few lines later "that on the whole our insight into these processes of develop-

ment in the girl is unsatisfying, shadowy and incomplete."[7] The following year, Freud would take yet another stab at the enigma of female sexuality, and in "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" Freud offers what are perhaps his most misogynistic remarks on the topic. In this essay Freud describes the little girl as presenting "a problem," and he proceeds to offer a host of explanations for why she would abandon the attachment to her mother: penis envy ("She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it"); narcissistic wounding ("She develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority"); putting the blame on the mother ("The girl's mother, who sent her into the world so insufficiently equipped, is almost always held responsible"); and, in a convoluted move, the desire to become a mother in order to compensate for her lack ("She gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: and with this purpose in view she takes her father as a love-object").[8] Indeed, Freud's frustration with his inability to crack the enigma of female desire is palpable in the aggressivity of his response. For example, when he writes that he "cannot escape the notion that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men," and that women's super-egos are "never so inexorable" as men's, we can hear the echo of a projection, that is, his own super-ego berating him for his failure to resolve the problem of the little girl.[9]

It is only in 1931, in "Female Sexuality," that Freud would arrive at a slightly more complicated account of how a female subject might "find her way to her father" and resolve a heterosexual Oedipus complex. In a complete reversal of his position stated in 1924, where he writes that the girl version is "far simpler" than that of the boy, Freud now states that for boys "the explanation is simple," whereas "with little girls it is otherwise."[10] The girl's journey to heterosexuality, Freud now notes, is anything but straightforward. Not only must she give up her attachment to the mother in favor of the father; she must also make the additional shift from "active" or phallic (clitoral) sexuality to "passive" or genital sexuality. In a moment of classic Freudian insight delivered through a protestation of ignorance, he confesses that he is unable to assign this transition "any teleological purpose."[11]

According to Freud's final version of this story, the road to normative heterosexuality begins when the little girl renounces her attachment to her mother—the first love object, in Freud's account, for children of both genders—and transfers her affections to her father,

ultimately to seek a replacement for him for whom she may herself bear a child who will in turn compensate her own lack. As Freud tells us, and as feminist critics have reminded us, this account burdens the female subject with an additional step that is not required of the little boy. That is, the castration complex that intervenes to mark the mother as a lacking, unacceptable love object demands not only that the daughter come to view the mother as damaged goods, but also that she assume this lack herself through identification. This narrative demands that the little girl exit the halcyon, precastration epoch of the negative Oedipus complex, marked by an exclusive attachment to the mother: an epoch in which femininity does not pose a problem. There is an imbalance here. The little boy is permitted to retain his erotic attachment to his mother and her gender as long as he renounces possession of her in favor of a future surrogate, and he is never required to leave the phallic stage of sexuality. The little girl, on the other hand, is required to make two additional sacrifices: she must give up her attachment to her mother, and she must exit the phallic phase in favor of the genital phase.

The female subject's journey thus involves a more convoluted path, and it takes her psychically abroad in ways that are more complicated. One might say that in Freud's story the little girl's path toward heterosexuality involves several forks or moments of disorientation. There is a swerve away from an initial homosexuality and attachment to the mother, which belies the notion of a teleological journey toward heterosexuality. The normative path to female heterosexuality paradoxically involves a mandatory detour: in order to arrive at the normative, expected destination, the girl must get a little bit lost on the way there. In addition, the substitution of the father for the mother involves a displacement whereby the prototypical love object is actually the second one. There is thus a melancholic loss that structures female heterosexuality, one that is at a deeper recess than the generic loss that signifies the dissolution of the Oedipus complex for both genders. Furthermore, the assumption of castration not merely as a threat of a potential loss of privilege but as a condition of her own subjectivity involves a "becoming other to herself" that is not demanded of male subjects. Coming to view herself as castrated involves not merely a coming to terms with the inferior status that society confers upon her gender but also a kind of identification with radical otherness, with what the male subject is encouraged to project away. The little girl who

becomes heterosexual in the manner described by Freud in this late essay—keeping in mind that other manners might (and must) be possible through different permutations of desire and identification—thus has early and frequent brushes with alterity and a deep familiarity with the experience of disorientation. Here, I mean for the word "disorientation" to resonate in two ways, in the usual sense of lacking a clear direction as well as in invoking the vicissitudes of sexual orientation or object choice.

This reading of Freud's version of the female Oedipus complex has several implications. First, we have the paradoxical notion that the shortest distance (and straightest path) to heterosexuality involves getting lost along the way. Second, we have the suggestion that disorientation might be built into the female psyche from the first instances. Finally, we have the experience of internal alterity as a fundamental and required identification for this hypothetical female subject. These features of female subjectivity—reading them not as prescriptive but as consequences of the Freudian account of the Oedipus complex—potentially allow the female subject a more complex relationship both to "lostness" and to internal alterity. One need not perform a redemptive reading of, say, the castration complex to observe that this hypothetical female subjectivity is not predicated on an absolute and lasting rejection of alterity in the way that is normative or even required for Freud's hypothetical male subject. Neither does it set up an analogously absolute sense of egoic continuity and self-sameness; rather, discontinuity and subjective undoing are inscribed in the very template of female desire. Vivian Sobchack sums it up neatly in *Carnal Thoughts*: "Men . . . cannot generally accept negotiating space as a hermaneutic problem. They disavow the possibility of being lost."[12]

Kaja Silverman in her essay "Girl Love" makes complementary claims through a reading of the installation *Photograph* by the Irish artist James Coleman. Silverman revisits the question of female desire in this essay, and she identifies a type of untapped love that is to be found in the palimpsest-like traces of the female negative Oedipus complex. Coleman's installation documents a friendship between two girls in a dance performance, one of whom is Caucasian and the other African-Irish. Silverman hints that there is something about way that affect circulates in the precastration economy of female desire that is more flexible around issues of difference. As Silverman writes, "Coleman maps girl love across the racial divide . . . This is extraordinarily

important since the distinction between 'blackness' and 'whiteness' can also be traced back to a kind of castration crisis—this time one in which 'whiteness' emerges as the privileged trope, and 'blackness' undergoes a radical deidealization."[13]

There are advantages and disadvantages to this way of understanding the female Oedipus complex. On the one hand, such interpretations could be seen as authenticating the path to so-called normative female heterosexuality, thereby effectively giving the hypothetical little girl a pat on the head for her willingness to be dislocated and undone. It also potentially implies that male, heterosexual subjects lack the incentive or capacity to be undone in analogous ways. Furthermore, as some scholars of psychoanalytic theory have pointed out, the endorsement of ego-dissolving modes of being and of lack as a truer or more ethical form of subjectivity—regardless of gender or sexuality—entails many risks, ranging from a blind embrace of what may be an essentially self-abnegating psyche to the failure to imagine forms of being that resonate through and from one's own psychical history rather than from an abstract void.[14] Along similar lines, the theory of a fundamentally melancholic subject can also be critiqued under the assumption that giving pride of place to melancholia effectively valorizes a death-driven concept of subjective experience.[15] Additionally, when universalized or abstracted, the notion of a kind of subjectivity predicated upon loss could be said to fail to address the particular conditions of subjects who have endured concrete traumatic losses. In other words, socially privileged subjects may suffer a structuring loss or two as they pass through the Oedipus complex, but to call this melancholia, these critics argue, risks conflating it with more severe and less productive types of loss. We might answer these criticisms with the suggestion that the notion of a structuring melancholia has a deconstructive value, insofar as it uncovers gaps in the psychoanalytic model of the subject, for example by revealing the extent to which so-called normative heterosexuality is founded upon the foreclosure of desire and upon lost and unmourned nonheteronormative love objects.[16]

The state of "lostness" that I have attributed to the narrative of the girl abroad in Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain* and that I have linked to Freud's account of the female Oedipus complex offers another possible way of addressing this problem. The problem of theorizing race and other forms of social difference—and of thinking through the failure of existing theories to address them—is to some extent inseparable

from the problem of how to get away from the solipsistic, doubting subject in her various guises: the one who is trapped in a Wellesian "crazy house" of projections, the one who recuperates the other as a figment of her own imagination, the one who distrusts her ability to discern the real world from its false copies, or the one who stamps the other out with red ink. As Laplanche points out, though, this philosophical problem need not exist; it is one that psychoanalysis and other disciplines have inherited from Cartesian skepticism. "Now, my problem is not that," Laplanche writes. "It's not a problem of the other world, the other thing . . . The problem, on our human level, is that the other does not have to be reconstructed. The other is prior to the subject . . . So you don't have to construct it, it first comes to you, as an enigma."[17]

In contrast to these types of subjects who are not sure how to access the external world, the lost girl is confronted with the world in a palpable way. She may not have her bearings or feel at home in it, but it is precisely for this reason that she is aware of its existence. She may register her location's otherness to her in a way that merely reifies its foreignness, but then again she may become the conduit for a reciprocal movement between two locations, a negotiation of the old and familiar and the new and strange.[18] The lost girl may in fact be uniquely suited to perform as such a conduit, insofar as the experience of disorientation forms a foundational part of her psychical makeup. She has a willingness to inhabit and valorize transitional spaces over and against destinations, an openness to what is new and different, and a sense of the external world as present and affecting.

As I have suggested above, though, Calle does not remain a "lost girl" for the entirety of her journey. She ultimately finds her compass by falling back upon a familiar father-figure type of love object. The installation also ultimately valorizes Calle's own internal life over the external and unfamiliar world that is represented by Japan: her preoccupation with her lover trumps and blots out Japan's newness, and she comes to curse that country. By repeating an Oedipal pattern of desire, and by occupying herself with a known form of love and loss, one might say that Calle successfully sidesteps (or deprives herself of) a more radical loss that might have resulted from a more sustained encounter with the unfamiliar. What is poignant about *Exquisite Pain* is not simply the story of the break-up; rather, it is the story of how anxiety and grief intercede to stamp out Japan, graphically as well as

metaphorically, ultimately to make it fade into blackness. *Exquisite Pain* is thus not only an archive of mourning but also a startling record of the lengths to which the psyche may unconsciously go in order to avoid an encounter with otherness. The "Dear Sophie" telegram and her lover's cryptic silences are not the only enigmatic signifiers here, although they are the most obvious and oft-repeated ones. "Japan" is their hidden double, the melancholic enigma that is cursed and swept aside rather than narrated and mourned.

Nevertheless, there are ways in which Sophie Calle embodies the more dynamic qualities of the lost girl, and there are aspects of *Exquisite Pain* that tell a story other than a one-sided avoidance and demonization of the East. Although it is clear that the condition of lostness that Calle initially experiences along her journey and in Japan is, to a certain degree, unsustainable—Calle seems lonely, and many of her textual diaries testify to days spent with very little human contact—there are moments that visually and textually reference a mode of cross-cultural exchange and travel that is not predicated on the occupation of a stable, unassailable subject position. In such moments, *Exquisite Pain* seems to reference Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), a film that tells another story of a young French woman abroad in Japan, attempting to make sense of that nation's historical trauma through reference to a loss of her own.[19] Despite the fact that Japan is ultimately blotted out, there are moments during the first half of *Exquisite Pain* when Calle gamely follows along the disorientations that it offers.

One way of describing such moments is offered by Ackbar Abbas, who in "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong" asks an urgent question: What are the alternatives to violent colonialism in the face of an encounter with otherness? He begins with Ulf Hannerz's definition of cosmopolitanism: "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other . . . an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences."[20] This is one way of describing the stance that Calle appears to occupy during the initial stages of her journey to Japan. Abbas goes on to interrogate the notion of cosmopolitanism, and he suggests that while it may be "an admirable one" it is practicable only in the most privileged circumstances. He ultimately wonders whether cosmopolitanism might in some cases be simply another "version of 'cultural imperialism.'"[21] In an age of globalization, Abbas continues, "cosmopolitanism can no longer be

simply a matter of behaving well or even of an openness to otherness. Otherness lost its innocence as a result of the colonial experience. Even less attractive is the alternative of a brutal embrace of ethnocentric vision, an anticosmopolitanism made more extreme because it exists in the new and charged situation of information and speed . . . Can there be a cosmopolitanism for the global age, and what would it look like?"[22] Narrow ethnocentrism, staying squarely in one's own cultural territory, cannot be the answer, but neither can a liberal multiculturalist discourse of tolerance and color blindness that risks sealing over differences. In his essay Abbas proposes "arbitrage" as a possible answer to this dilemma. In the business and finance worlds, Abbas explains, this term refers to the exploitative practice of bolstering profits by moving production to those countries with the lowest wages, and to the practice of capitalizing on price fluctuations artificially created by lags among time zones. Abbas suggests that this term might be reclaimed for social and cultural practice. Arbitrage with a difference would mean "not the use of technologies to maximize profits in a global world" but rather "everyday strategies for negotiating the disequilibria and dislocations that globalism has created." The new cosmopolitans of this global world would not be "universalist arbiters of value" but rather "some of the less privileged men and women in the transnational space of the city who are trying to make sense of its spatial and temporal contradictions."[23] The figure of the lost girl might be one such subject, an example of a contemporary "arbitrageuse," for the "disequilibria and dislocations" and the "spatial and temporal contradictions" that shape her psyche may make her especially well suited to navigate the cities that share these structuring features. The gaps in her subjectivity—temporal dysphasia, spatial leaps, and epistemological contradictions—might occasionally intersect with these cities and cultures in a noneradicative, nonappropriative way.

THE WALL AND THE ARCADE

The first half of *Exquisite Pain* contains examples of "detranslation" of the enigmatic signifier. As I describe in the previous chapter, detranslation (or more simply, Laplanchean translation) involves a response to enigma that is different from paranoid repudiation, that involves an opening of oneself to the alterity it represents, and that does not go off in pursuit of a nonexistent original that is presumed to supply a defini-

tive meaning. Calle's first attempt at translation is a literal one; it takes a linguistic form. Seven days into her train ride, she writes of a Russian man with whom she attempted to communicate in sign language and through the limited vocabulary they shared: "From time to time, Anatoli mutters a word such as *Mitterrand*, or *Paris*, just like that, for the pleasure of being understood . . . When we talk he spends a lot of time slapping his forehead with his hands in disbelief or annoyance [*d'incompréhension et de découragement*]. But those same hands have also informed me that Anatoli is 68, that he has two daughters, born in 1951 and 1953, that he divorced his wife and that she lives in Moscow, and that he has had two heart attacks, one in 1978, the other in 1980."[24] At this early stage in her journey, Calle is still optimistic about the prospects of communication and connection, even in the absence of a shared spoken language. As Yve-Alain Bois notes, several of the photographs in this section of *Exquisite Pain* also appear in an older series entitled *Anatoli* (first exhibited in 1986); Bois suggests that Anatoli's reappearance in the newer project relates less to remembrance than to "contingency . . . the latent content of photography, [and] the manifest concern of all Calle's works."[25] This inclusion adds another layer of translation, from the context of one photo series to another. Bois also comments on another intertextual feature of *Exquisite Pain*—the translation of the events it depicts into literature. Calle and the French author Hervé Guibert spent time together in Tokyo while Calle was there, and Guibert later transformed her into a character in a novel.

As Calle's journey continues, and especially after her arrival in China and then Japan, her attempts to communicate become less frequent. More of the photographs simply show objects or scenery without any accompanying letter or text (of the twenty plates that immediately follow her arrival in China, seventeen of the images are without caption). In Japan, her letters also begin to report more frequently on interior states of mind than on conversations with others. Although there are no more dialogues like the ones with Anatoli, there are a few other moments in which Calle attempts to speak in ways that fall outside her usual idiom, and to receive communications back. At "55 Days to Unhappiness," there is a black-and-white photograph of a wooden altar. A wooden sign hangs from it, which also reads in English: "Please write down your troubles on this paper and put it in the water nearby. When the paper dissolves in the water your troubles will be cleared up." Calle has yet to report her growing anxiety in the face of

the absence of her lover—the panels from the days just prior contain text and photographs of her time with Guibert. But the notion of binding the enigmatic signifier—that is, of dissolving its trauma through a signifying act—is literalized in the ritual of placing it into the water. With this image, we thus see Calle attempting to translate her own experience into the language of a Japanese ritual.

At this point it is necessary to revisit in more detail the Laplanchean notion of translation. In an essay entitled "The Wall and the Arcade," Laplanche theorizes a type of translation that is indebted to both Freud and Benjamin. Laplanche turns to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which is in many ways a text about translation: both the translation of unconscious wishes into dreams and the translation of dreams into interpretations. In that text Freud lists two ancient types of dream interpretation. In the "symbolic method," a dream's narrative is interpreted allegorically and prophetically: the interpreter who follows this method "considers the content of the dream as a whole and seeks to replace it by another content which is intelligible and in certain respects analogous to the original one." As an example of this method of interpretation, Freud describes the Pharaoh's dream propounded by Joseph in the Bible, in which "seven fat kine followed by seven lean kine that ate up the fat kine" was "a symbolic substitute for a prophecy of seven years of famine . . . which should consume all that was brought forth in the seven years of plenty."[26] In the *Chiffriermethode*, or "decoding method," individual images within the dream are matched up to an external code. As Freud puts it, this method "treats dreams as a kind of cryptography in which each sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key."[27] Freud provides the following example: "Suppose, for instance, that I have dreamt of a letter and also of a funeral. If I consult a 'dream-book,' I find that 'letter' must be translated by 'trouble' and 'funeral' by 'betrothal.' It then remains for me to link together the keywords which I have deciphered in this way."[28] While Freud finds both methods inadequate, he prefers the word-by-word aspect of the second, with the caveat that the key must come from the individual rather than from a fixed handbook, and that the code is always context dependent and subject to change. Glossing Freud, Laplanche suggests that it is the "word-by-word" interpretation that makes it possible to "head out towards the other" and "to prolong the movement forward," rather than to make the translated object "come to oneself."[29]

The above statements require explication, and we find one in Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," which Laplanche explicitly invokes in his essay. Benjamin proposes two metaphors for approaches to translation, the wall and the arcade: "For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade."[30] The wall-like translation is the one that aims for a solid expression of the "spirit" or underlying meaning of the text, seamlessly presented in the idiom of the destination language. This approach correlates to the symbolic method of dream interpretation, where the whole of the dream is interpreted allegorically. The arcade-like translation, on the other hand, has holes in it—internal gaps where the original text shines through as if through the spaces between the individual words.[31] It is a lattice through which we may glimpse the limits and possibilities of both languages, or what Benjamin calls the "reciprocal relationship" and "longing for complementation" between them, and ultimately the "foreign" elements in one's own language.[32] The totalizing translation privileges the destination language. Like the continuity editing of film it attempts to hide its ruptures and frame lines, to filter out any jarring traces of alterity, and to mask its status as a provisional signifier. The arcade-like translation, on the other hand, calls attention to itself as sign, preserves the strangeness of the original, and thereby reveals its own strangeness and lacks. As Laplanche puts it, "We don't enter the forest (the too familiar use of our own language); we also don't press our nose up to one single tree (such as the lover of reality in Plato); here we are then at the edge of the forest, where *every* tree detaches itself to try to cause a *resonance* from tree to tree of something that echoes the original."[33] The "echo" that Laplanche speaks of here represents an alternative to Jake Gittes's uncomprehending mimicking of the Chinese gardener in *Chinatown*, as well as his repetition of traumatic events from his Chinatown past. It also differs from the desire for absolute sameness embodied by Noah Cross in that film, and from the paranoia regarding the proliferation of "fake copies" that I discuss in relation to *Blade Runner*. The echo we hear in the arcade-like translation is, rather, a conduit between the foreign and the familiar, one that allows a reciprocal movement between them. It offers an opportunity for the other to become more familiar, and for the familiar to become more strange. In this sense, it is like the lost girl.

In *Primitive Passions* Rey Chow also turns to Benjamin, and, briefly, to Laplanche's reading of him in "The Wall and the Arcade," and in

doing so she adapts this concept to the notion of the translation of a place into images in Chinese contemporary film. She extends this particular notion of translation to China's broader cultural shift from a literature-based society to a society of the spectacle and the adoption of foreign technologies to accomplish this shift. In her gloss of Laplanche, Chow describes a situation where "the 'native' should let the foreign affect, or infect, itself, and vice versa," and she suggests that "this radical notion of translation is what leads Jean Laplanche to describe Benjamin's theory as an 'anti-ethnocentric' one."[34] China, Chow suggests, makes just such a move out toward the other when it adopts Western filmic technologies and conventions. But have there been reciprocal movements on the part of the West? As I have suggested, we see glimpses of it in *Adynata*, *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, and *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*. This movement can also be theorized through the figure of the lost girl, in whom the entrenched and paranoid structures dedicated to the preservation of the self are momentarily dissolved. In taking up and expanding upon Chow's question I suggest that there are several kinds of translation at stake that benefit from reconsideration through Laplanche. There is the verbal translation of a text from one language to another, as well as the formal translation of a text from one signifying mode to another (literature into film, for example). One might translate a place or culture into a representation of it, or a psychical representation into language and other signs. Finally, in an era characterized by the circulation of globalizing, digital culture, we might detranslate the impacted traces of various media forms and cultural reference points that amalgamate together in examples of convergence culture.[35] The key to discovering new modes of such translations lies in finding arcades rather than walls.

Exquisite Pain surely erects great walls against Japan. In the version that was exhibited at the Paula Cooper Gallery, literal walls separated part one of the installation from part two in the next room. Still, there are moments in *Exquisite Pain* where cracks in these walls begin to emerge. The very structure of Calle's installation suggests as much. She proceeds "word by word," image by image, day by day, rendering the gaps in understanding apparent through the framing, captioning, and lack thereof. As Bois suggests, the images are linked together not through strict logical causality but rather through relations of contingency inspired by photography's own allegiance to this category. At

times, Calle stops "Frenchifying" Japan and tries to "Japanicize" herself by seeking out unfamiliar rituals and methods through which to make sense of her predicament. At 46 Days to Unhappiness Calle tells of one such experience. Not having received a letter from her lover for some time, Calle becomes increasingly obsessed with divining his state of mind, and she writes a letter to him in which she tells of a visit to a fortune teller: "This evening, at the intersection of Shinjuku, there was a fortune teller. I thought the woman might be able to point me in the right direction. I would go where she told me to go. I would obey. Without thinking, I held out my hands. She took them in hers and spoke. I let her go on. But since Marie-Jeanne doesn't understand Japanese either, I left without having understood the slightest bit of her predictions. And now, I am obsessed by the idea that her prophecies might contain some scrap of information that I could seize on. Did she say you had left me?"[36] This anecdote offers a neat parable for the enigmatic signifier of the other's desire. Indeed, fortune telling and palm reading in general would seem to literalize the notion of an inscrutable other inscribed within an inscrutable self, as does the photograph of Calle offering the woman her open hands to be read.[37] Calle ascribes a secret knowledge about her lover and herself to the faceless fortune teller. As if through a sleight of hand, the Japanese woman becomes the shrewd other who withholds the secrets of Calle's desire. In this way, the fortune teller is put in a role similar to that of the gardener in *Chinatown* and the thug in *The Shanghai Gesture*—characters who play only marginal roles in the narrative yet seem to harbor some key kernel of intelligence that is unknown to the stories' Western protagonists. She may remind us also of Wim Wenders in *Notebook on Cities and Clothes* at the very beginning of his pilgrimage to Yamamoto's studio in Tokyo. Wenders's journey was initially inspired by a desire to get to the bottom of the supposed secret that Yamamoto enfolds into the fabric of his coat. Calle likewise naively imagines her Japanese fortune teller as a Sphinx-like being, a supernatural or even inhuman oracle who has the power to reveal Calle's own innermost secrets but who vexingly withholds this information from her.

Although Calle knows full well that she lacks the means to understand, she lets the fortune teller continue. In fact, she goes to another fortune teller the very next day—at 45 Days to Unhappiness—this time bringing a translator along. In this image, Calle once again extends her palms face up, this time to a male fortune teller. A table to his

The Japanese fortune teller: "46 Days to Unhappiness," from Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain*. (© Sophie Calle. Courtesy of the Paula Cooper Gallery, N.Y. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris).

left holds a canister of incense. Like the previous photograph, this one is shot in black and white and framed at a medium distance. The second fortune teller, Calle relates in the accompanying text, predicts a storm and warns her that "nothing good" will happen to her in Japan.[38] On the third day she makes yet another attempt, this time visiting a clairvoyant who tells her that she should "try to find a center for the disabled." The clairvoyant is shot head-on, looking directly at the camera, and Calle is not visible in the frame. "As communication problems go, you couldn't get much worse than that," Calle notes, not sure whether the clairvoyant is recommending that she herself seek professional assistance or whether she should merely visit such a center as a guest.[39] But like the symbolic-method interpreter of dreams, Calle gamely follows this poorly translated advice and goes to a center for the blind, where she photographs a Japanese man holding a walking stick in one hand and a set of Western cutlery in the other. He wears a collared shirt and tie, and a tailored, Western-style trench coat. This photograph

The blind man: image from Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain*. © Sophie Calle. Courtesy of the Paula Cooper Gallery, N.Y. Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris.

appears to have been taken with the same camera and on the same black-and-white film stock as the previous three, and like them its accompanying text takes the form of a letter to Calle's absent lover that begins with the greeting "My love." These four images appear to belong together in a set. They are preceded by another black-and-white image, this time with no accompanying text, of a door on which has been inscribed the word *jetée*, as if to mark the fortune teller saga as a point of embarkation where Calle is thrown into something new.

On the one hand these images and bits of text do nothing to dismantle the paranoid logic of the enigmatic signifier, and neither do they resist the temptation to project it onto Japan. In this section of the piece, in fact, Japan has become so fully identified with the trauma of not knowing that Calle tells us she agrees with the fortune teller who told her that "nothing good would happen" to her in Japan. However, there is another way to read these images, particularly when we separate them from their anxious captions. Translated into a Western idiom, the image of the blind man might appear as a metaphor for Tiresius, the blind seer embodied in the fortune teller, or for Oedipus, whom Calle mirrors not only in her Oedipal object choice but also in her blindness to her own impending tragedy. In his Western clothing, and holding a spoon, this man could alternately be read as an allegory of the West's cultural colonization of the East—or from a Japanese perspective, as a warning against assimilation to Western modes of behavior. It could also be read as a reverse projection: Calle's staging of the photo expresses her lack of familiarity with the tools of Japanese culture, and, through a permutation of roles, vengefully reverses that situation. Or perhaps the cutlery could be interpreted as Calle's way of marking the photograph as a complicated cross-cultural translation rather than a transparent ethnographic window onto the blind man. At no time, it is true, does Calle's piece attempt to pass itself off as an impartial ethnography; she makes abundantly clear that her images are subjective, shot through with affect, and that they originate from a very particular point of view and psychical bearing. In this respect, *Exquisite Pain* is not conventionally orientalist in Said's sense of the word. It attempts to contain the Orient, but it does so neither through the classic strategies of adopting a superior or primitivizing attitude nor through a mode of address that renders the East in terms of familiar Western paradigms. Its orientalism takes another form, that of the projection of an enigma and the subsequent anxious rush to contain it.

In *Exquisite Pain* what Calle opens her palms and allows us to see, wittingly or not, is the series of disorientations by which Japan came to be associated for her with an enigmatic otherness and with the unknown. Calle's journey does not take the expected travelogue form wherein a place starts out strange and overwhelming only to become increasingly familiar. Calle's trip takes the opposite form: Japan becomes increasingly foreign the longer she stays there. On the one hand this means that with the passing of days, as Calle resigns from her task as translator, Japan finally recedes from the installation. On the other hand this means that Japan is not reified as other from the start. Like the little girl in Freud's story of female sexuality, it has become so and been made so through an unfortunate series of displacements, each step of which Calle documents and grants her spectators access to. In this case, the fantasmatic lover who is the unseen addressee of the letters we read here is the increasingly great wall that separates Calle from Japan. The longer he remains silent, the more solid grows the wall.

ART HOUSE ORIENTALISM *Lost in Translation*

Like *Exquisite Pain*, Sofia Coppola's film *Lost in Translation* tells a story of a "lost girl": a young Western woman abroad in Japan, eager in some ways to experience something new, but also reticent. The characters in both works are young women journeying to Tokyo for the first time, and both are ultimately distracted from their travels by relationships that fit the mold of the positive Oedipus complex. In *Lost in Translation*, the recent Yale graduate Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson), dissatisfied in her two-year-long marriage, has accompanied her music-producer husband on a business trip to film a video. By chance, Charlotte meets Bob (Bill Murray), a fading, B-level Hollywood actor, in the bar of the Park Hyatt Hotel. Charlotte recognizes Bob from his movies. This dose of the familiar provides an antidote to their shared homesickness and insomnia, and a sublimated yet eroticized friendship is sparked. Both are tentatively seduced away from their primary relationships by the siren call of Tokyo nightlife (Bob's wife makes her presence known through a flurry of faxes about home renovations, while Charlotte's husband seems oblivious to her growing ennui). The remainder of the film sees their relationship develop over more cocktails at the hotel bar, sushi, and visits to strip clubs and

karaoke rooms. Bob's superior age, paternal bearing, and familiarity to Charlotte from his appearances in movies she saw in her childhood mark him as an Oedipal object for her. Ultimately, both characters are protected from the erotic diversions of the East by virtue of their tie to one other; as in *Exquisite Pain*, the Oedipus complex is what protects and distracts from alterity.

Lost in Translation is littered with familiar signifiers for an unfamiliar Japan: streets ablaze with neon pictographs, bowing concierges bustling after guests in a high-tech hotel, pop-star hipsters with multicolored hair sporting synthetic fashions. Marketed as a comedy, the film prompts snickers of amusement from an American audience. However, its humor did not translate well with Japanese spectators. The film's Japanese distributor, Tohokushinsha Co., opted for a delayed opening at a single Tokyo movie theater, with a Website trailer as its sole marketing campaign. Local critics were not laughing either: Yoshio Tsuchiya called the film "stereotypical and discriminatory."[40] The writer Kotaro Sawaki noted that the Japanese characters "are consistently portrayed as foolish."[41] Indeed, the film's orientalism is egregious enough to have prompted the Los Angeles–based nonprofit organization Asian Media Watch to launch a campaign against its four Academy Award nominations.[42] In spite of such protests the film garnered the Oscar for best original screenplay, and the majority of American critics continued to rave about its nuanced representation of cultural alienation.

There are many scenes that one might well imagine that the Japanese critics and Asian Media Watch probably had in mind when they criticized the film's racism. For one, there is a scene in which Bob shows up at a studio where he is to shoot an advertisement for Suntory whiskey. He is soon confronted with the images that Japanese culture has projected onto him as a representative of Hollywood masculinity.[43] The photographer commands him to assume various iconic poses—a James Bond wink, a Dean Martin swagger—as Bob reluctantly tips his glass for the camera. The scene is acted and shot for humor at the expense of the Japanese perception of what a desirable American male looks like: how he sits and gestures, what kind of suit he wears, what kind of whiskey he drinks. The more Bob poses for the photographer, the more he is emasculated, both because he is following the orders of a man who cannot correctly pronounce "Rat Pack" and "Roger Moore" and because the images he re-creates seem anti-

quated and fey by contemporary American standards. But this emasculation does not stick to Bob. Rather, it is attributed in the film to a laughable Japanese naiveté, of which Bob is the shrugging victim.

Many scenes in *Lost in Translation* seem to present opportunities for the mirror to be held up in the other direction. However, because point of view is limited to Charlotte and Bob, we see more of their incomprehension than that of their hosts. The film's humor is slippery throughout. Bob's look of droopy indifference when he finds himself once again the tallest person in the elevator, or when he blankly flips through channel after channel of highly genre-coded Japanese television, walks a thin line between self-effacement and sarcasm. His face is an amalgam of jet lag and irritation when he encounters a group of bowing greeters at the hotel. When a call girl arrives at Bob's hotel room, the camera seems to encourage spectators' laughter as she implores him earnestly to "lip [rip] my stockings" (apparently an Oscar-worthy line of screenwriting). The film prompts us to read this incident, as well as Bob's quick exit from an after-hours strip club, as comedic critiques of Japanese sexuality and gender discrimination rather than as comments on American prudishness. The film presents or "focalizes" these images from Bob's point of view: instead of Bob it is the dancer who is overly salacious and it is the bowing greeter whom we are meant to perceive as ridiculous. Other scenes in the film—Bob's appearance on a Japanese television show, for instance—share in this attitude.

Such moments of overt, caricature-style racism are presumably what the Japanese critics were responding to in their reviews of the film. However, there are several ways in which *Lost in Translation* does break from the tradition of orientalism and from stereotypes of the lascivious Asian seductress or hysterical Asian male. First, as in Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain*, at no point does the film definitively occupy the confident position of the superior Western gaze upon the non-Western. Like the film's humor, its enunciation is ambiguous and slippery. The film's author never clearly locates herself in relation to the city and people she films. The camera and Charlotte both behave like bewildered tourists at one turn and intimate locals at the next. This is a major difference from *Exquisite Pain*, a text whose rigid formal structure strives to neutralize the affect of "lostness" and sense of disorientation that nonetheless emerge between its frames. *Lost in Translation*, by contrast, occasionally revels in those affects: the "disorientation, panic,

heart palpitations, loss of identity, fear and dizziness . . . [that can] beset certain foreign tourists," as Sobchack notes in her writings on Stendhal's Syndrome.[44] Formally, the film lends emphasis to scenes and images that depict incomprehension, ceding of control, and loss of bearings, for example in images that show Charlotte struggling to correlate a subway map to the city it encodes, and in scenes that show her abandoning the distinction between day and night. The sensation of being detached from the usual spatial and temporal rubrics, the film makes clear, can be highly pleasurable and even transformative. In this way, the lost girl provides a foil for the film noir detective. While both are explorers of a foreign and enigmatic world, the detective attempts to maintain his spatio-temporal coordinates and to pierce through a foreign world to unearth its hidden meanings. The lost girl understands from the beginning that she will not unearth any secrets about this world but only perhaps about herself. One might wish that the lost girl would stop soul searching for a moment and see something other than her own alienation reflected in the windows and television screens around her. Still, she provides a necessary (if far from foolproof) corrective to the detective's insistence on his separation from the world he inspects, as well as his faith in epistemological mastery.

Coppola's images of Tokyo streets, viewed through the windows of taxis, reveal a chaos of siren-like signs ablaze and saturating the skyline in a manner reminiscent of *Blade Runner.* Cityscapes that appear to defy the laws of Western perspective and curving off-ramps that appear to defy gravity seem at times to participate in the pictorial conventions through which Chinatowns and their kin appear in classical Hollywood cinema. Both *Blade Runner* and classical films noir deploy these spaces—critically at times, to be sure—as dystopic arenas of multiculturalism gone awry, to reference Lisa Lowe's reading of that film. They are labyrinthine worlds where "you don't know who is a crook and who isn't a crook," to quote Robert Towne on *Chinatown.* They are sites of unintelligible alterity where Western systems of rationality and meaning reach their limits, thereby provoking an epistemological crisis. In *Lost in Translation*, Tokyo likewise appears as an amalgam of enigmatic signifiers, but one that is utopic rather than dystopic. Bob and Charlotte cavort across the surface of Tokyo's aesthetically stimulating nightlife; the city's culture of signs is rendered all the more exhilarating because they cannot read it and thus can only appreciate it for its visual and sensory properties. Such images continue to "other"

The lost girl: Scarlett Johansson in *Lost in Translation*.
(Universal Home Entertainment)

Japan's signifying excess, but they idealize it rather than attempting to suppress it. The film's final images are shot from the inside of a taxi taking Bob to the airport, along the same circular highway where Wenders shot the opening scenes of *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*. Read along these lines, *Lost in Translation*'s final enigmatic signifier — a secret that Bob whispers to Charlotte just prior to their final separation, inaudible to the film's spectators — constitutes the new, twenty-first-century counterpart to Elsa's incriminating Cantonese phone call in *The Lady from Shanghai*, and the *Chinatown* gardener's loaded remarks about salt water and the grass. Accompanied by the hazy sounds of the Jesus and Mary Chain's "Just Like Honey" (1985) from the album *Psychocandy*, the final whisper seems less like a vexingly withheld and corrupting secret than like a sweet nothing.

There are a few scenes in *Lost in Translation* where we get an inkling that the incomprehension is mutual, and a flicker of understanding that the West might also be an exotic enigma for the East. In a scene at a hospital, where Charlotte is being treated for a fractured toe, a stranger in the waiting room asks Bob in Japanese how many years he has been in Japan. Failing to understand, Bob can only mimic a few syllables and gestures. But unlike Jake Gittes's sarcastic imitations of the gardener and butler in *Chinatown*, Bob's performance is received with humor,

Karaoke rooms: *Lost in Translation*. (Universal Home Entertainment)

and his interlocutor bursts into laughter. The answer to his question—very little time at all—is evident, not from the content of Bob's utterances but from their form, which betrays his inability to speak Japanese. The tables have been turned on Bob. Whereas the Suntory whiskey ads saw the East uncomprehendingly imitating the West, now West copies East. There are additional references to imitation in the film that challenge or complicate the paranoia surrounding the Eastern copy that I discuss in previous chapters. During an extended nightlife sequence, for example, Bob and Charlotte, along with some of Charlotte's Japanese friends, rent a karaoke room in a high-rise building. The songs they perform are Western—The Sex Pistols, Elvis Costello, Roxy Music—and during a rendition of The Pretenders' "Brass in Pocket," Charlotte dons a pink bobbed wig. The wig calls attention to the representational status of their performances, and it serves as a reminder of the series of translations by which pop music and culture have been filtered through Japanese technology before being returned to American ears. In Abbas's terms, Charlotte becomes a kind of cultural arbitrageuse in this scene by negotiating Tokyo's technical and aesthetic contradictions and giving them expression through and alongside her own dislocation. In an exterior shot, the building's façade appears as if sectioned into dozens of television screens. This image reminds us that we are in a world of fantasy and signs rather

than realities, signs that have been replicated and transformed many times over. However, these signs have not been neutralized by the series of translations they have undergone. The songs retain their affective charge, sensory fullness, and psychical authenticity, as if they had not lost a generation.

It is through a reading of the film that highlights and is attentive to gender that its possibilities for thinking differently about encounters with alterity most patently emerge. As in *Exquisite Pain*, there are scenes in *Lost in Translation* that witness the lone female wanderer attempting to translate her own experience into the terms of Japanese ritual. Bob remains a somewhat hopeless fish out of water to the end: his minor attempts to interact with Japan come across as affably tolerant at best and phony or patronizing at worst. Charlotte's relatively open state, by contrast, allows her to merge with the culture and even to appropriate elements from Japan in ways that resist reinscribing the lines of absolute difference. We see her admiring traditional Ikibana displays, decorating her hotel room with artificial pink cherry blossoms, and tying a paper prayer to a tree outside a temple in Kyoto. In these scenes, we have the impression that Charlotte goes forth to meet Japan rather than pulling it closer to herself—that it is she who is becoming other to herself rather than Japan being assimilated through these appropriations. Here, Charlotte embodies the best qualities of the lost girl by becoming an arcade and a conduit between East and West.

In another scene, Charlotte visits a temple where she happens upon a funeral service in progress, with monks in yellow robes chanting seated on the floor. Upon returning to the hotel she telephones a friend, to whom she complains that she "didn't feel anything" during the ritual. As in the first half of *Exquisite Pain*, we glimpse a longing here for the transformative experience that an encounter with cultural alterity is supposed to provide, as well as a naiveté about how this soul-changing experience is supposed to happen. If we didn't already understand that Charlotte is searching for direction in her life, we are told so explicitly in a scene where she listens to a self-help audio CD. Like Calle, she is actively seeking new meaning and looking to be undone by something unfamiliar (rather than looking to be consolidated in her being by undoing something unfamiliar, as in the model of the classic investigator). As in the images from *Exquisite Pain* where Calle visits the fortune tellers, Charlotte here looks to Japan, to its

religion and local rituals, to provide her with answers about herself. But like Calle, Charlotte is disappointed when Japan fails to grant her the longed-for epiphany. Such patterns of desire participate in the logic of the enigmatic signifier in that they attribute knowledge about the self to the other, knowledge that the taciturn, Eastern other at times seems willfully to withhold. On the other hand, they also testify to a desire to escape this logic and to substitute for it an arcadian openness onto what is new and unknown.

Ultimately, both *Lost in Translation* and *Exquisite Pain* end up containing the Orient and "speaking on its behalf," to quote Said, in another way—namely, by representing it as a carnivalesque space where a Westerner may get lost, but without being significantly changed or unmoored by that experience. Charlotte "doesn't feel anything" when she encounters her cultural others on her own; it is only when she is tucked under Bob's paternal wing that she begins to explore more bravely. The promotional tagline for *Lost in Translation*—"Sometimes you have to go half way around the world to come full circle"—neatly encapsulates the way that the film sends Charlotte into a foreign territory, only to tuck her safely back under a familiar Oedipal wing. In this regard, Bob ultimately functions more as a wall than as an arcade. Although he is Charlotte's partner in disorientation, he serves as a barrier against any significant transformation and a crutch for the self-same subject. The metaphor of Bob as a crutch takes a literal form in the hospital scene, where he babies Charlotte's stubbed toe and pushes her around in a wheelchair.

Bob is a father figure who embodies the protective paternal function in relation to Charlotte as daughter figure. He intervenes to protect her from the chaos of the foreign milieu. Although his relationship to Charlotte might strike some as predatory, this is not how I read the film's presentation of it. Rather, the film casts Bob as the protective chaperone who encourages the young Charlotte to tread lightly through Japan's apparent minefield of erotic predation. These aspects of the film reveal that the lost girl is by no means a surefire conduit for reciprocal communication, for she risks being folded into both Oedipal narratives and colonialist ones. As Linda Williams has shown, Hollywood melodrama frequently deploys figures of young white femininity in sexual peril at the hands of racial others; these images function to reassert difference and to justify the premises of racial oppression.[45] The suffering white female of Hollywood melodrama

has an antecedent in late-seventeenth-century captivity narratives, and as Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse suggest, these accounts produced a new notion of "Englishness" that was defined through opposition to an uncivilized Native America and other "barbaric" European types.[46] The cultural work of the captivity narrative finds another form of expression in stories of train hijackings, the genre that provides the inspiration for Ulrike Ottinger's fantasy take on this tale in *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*.

Unlike Mary Rowlandson and her captive peers, Charlotte ventures voluntarily into foreign territory. Still, the film's recurring image of her seated in front of her hotel room window, arms crossed protectively over her torso and blurred into a hazy silhouette against the dizzying city lights below, strongly suggest the imprisonment of the innocent white female in a confusing, foreign land. The lost girl could be seen as the imperiled young emissary of Western subjectivity and values who, while traveling abroad, risks corruption by racial, sexual, and cultural others. While her travels are designed to educate her and shape her into a properly cosmopolitan woman of the world, they can only do so when she encounters that world within strict parameters. Charlotte requires paternal protection, and because Bob must authorize her forays into the Tokyo nightlife her voyage finally ratifies a Western patriarchal order. Indeed, her presence actively serves to remasculinize him at times: when Charlotte looks adoringly at Bob, the emasculation he has suffered at the hands of the Japanese advertising agency is magically undone.

It is interesting in this respect to note an analogy to the film's conditions of production, namely the director Sofia Coppola's position as the daughter of Francis Ford Coppola, a key figure of the Hollywood Renaissance, as well as the symbolic legacy and mythology that consequently surrounds her as both privilege and burden of this filiation. Like Bob, Coppola *père* also did advertisements for Suntory at one point in his career, and this story reportedly provided an element of inspiration for the scene in the film.[47] One could read *Lost in Translation* as the daughter's sequel to *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and contrast its quirky, postmodern, art-house brand of orientalism to the grand, modern version expressed in the father's war masterpiece and the Conrad novel from which it is adapted. If the daughter represents the father's legacy, then *Lost in Translation* may well represent the new, coordinateless form of orientalism that emerges in the wake of the

Hollywood Renaissance and the Vietnam War era. The primitive Viet Cong are replaced with technologically sophisticated, futuristic counterparts whose psyches are nonetheless equally inscrutable. The savage makes way for the cyborg; body paint makes way for television screens. The "hieroglyph" of film's classical era returns, not as a primitive fusion of body and sign but rather as a condensed mass media image that likewise resists decryption.

The analogy of the father and daughter directors to their surrogates in *Lost in Translation* begs the question: Does the auteur father serve a Bob-like function for the filmmaker daughter by enabling, financing, or otherwise authorizing her travels, where this sponsorship cannot help but ensure that she remains within a proscribed cultural boundary? Does his presence mean that she can never be anything but a figure of colonization, a representative of nascent, imperiled Western values? Such conclusions, as they regard either the filmmakers or their characters, strike me as a bit moralistic; moreover, they risk seeming to support a policy of complete isolationism regarding cross-cultural and international filmmaking, a position that I would suggest is not only counterproductive but also impossible to maintain in the global media context of the twenty-first century. Still, the laurels that *Lost in Translation* garnered and its success at the United States box office make clear the rewards that are to be had by remaining within that cultural boundary, and the film's negative reception in Japan makes clear the wider, global stakes of doing so.

How are we to understand *Lost in Translation*'s difference from its classical Hollywood and Hollywood Renaissance predecessors? What is the new form of orientalism in which it engages, and what correctives exist? In conclusion, I offer some brief remarks about how the opposition between East and West permutes under the auspices of the twenty-first century digital culture and the accompanying global circulation of mass media images, including filmic ones. In a world where there is no original, there is no filiation, no progeny, and no inferior copies. There is no such thing as "losing a generation"; all iterations are equally valid. This insight—borrowed from Laplanche's model of psychical translation—applies equally well to media reproduction in an age of global, electronic cultural circulation. Ulrike Ottinger provides a short anecdote about "so-called global" media, from an interview with Lawrence Rickels, that is pertinent to this topic. Ottinger

says that "under the conditions of monopoly . . . [and] the so-called global, something quite other than adaptation is happening, namely a certain production of sameness"—by which she seems to mean a homogenization, and presumably, a universalization of the Western. "The last time I was in Beijing," Ottinger continues, "I had a hotel room with a television set and I watched American shows with recognizable stars speaking perfect Chinese. They could speak Armenian, too, I'm sure. And I wonder what this could lead to."[48]

As Ottinger's anecdote makes clear, the United States is the internal other for a great percentage of the world in terms of what is shown on television and in movie theaters and also economically and militarily. In many countries, signifiers of United States corporate interests—Coca Cola, McDonald's—are the enigmatic signifiers that form a barrage of unintelligible content and that lure potential consumers with the promise of exotic goods. These signs crop up frequently in Asian cinema. We see logos for United States consumer goods in Yasujiro Ozu's *Tokyo Story* (1952), where they serve as symbols of the westernization, industrialization, and modernization of Japan. We hear the seductive call of enigmatic foreignness in Fai Wong's repetitious echoing of the song "California Dreaming" in Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express* (1994). These foreign signs crop up in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Tropical Malady* (2004), with its incongruous images of United States corporate advertising in a small village in a Thai jungle. For all their strangeness in that context, these ads might be Laplanche's cuneiform signs in the desert. Hollywood not only has its own internal alterities and accents, as I hope the examples I have worked with in this book show; more importantly, it *is* the structuring internal alterity in world cinema, the biggest and most omnipresent foreigner. What we call Hollywood, and what we call Western culture, though, are in large part no more or less than a series of attempts to make sense of their own internal alterities. In turn, the mass media translations of these images have the potential to expose differences that were already latent within them. It may well be that it is impossible to speak of an authentic or pure national cinema anymore, if that ever were possible. The trick, then, is to see where the traces of internal alterity are effaced, and where they are made manifest.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Silverman, Berger, and Conser, *The Last Remaining Seats*, 74.

2 Keye Luke, born in 1904 in Guangzhou, China, grew up in Seattle before moving to Los Angeles. He began his career as a commercial artist creating film publicity posters, and he is best known for his recurring role as Lee Chan, Charlie Chan's "Number One Son" in the Charlie Chan films of the 1930s and 1940s. He was the only Asian American actor to play a lead Asian detective in a Hollywood film during those decades, when he took over the role of Mr. Wong from Boris Karloff in *Phantom of Chinatown* (Rosen, 1940).

3 Helgesen, "Grauman's Chinese Theatre Hollywood," 3.

4 Ralph Flint, "Hollywood Impressions," *New York Times*, 30 October 1927, X6.

5 Ibid.

6 For an analysis of the significance of Egyptian motifs in cinema, see Lant, "The Curse of the Pharaohs."

7 For a helpful explication of this concept, which is discussed throughout Laplanche's oeuvre and which I invoke throughout this book, see Fletcher, "The Letter in the Unconscious." Leo Bersani also provides a succinct description of this concept, as follows: "The enigmatic signifier is a call like this: an adult addresses the infant with some message. For Laplanche the infant experiences this message as threatening . . . So how does the infant respond to these enigmatic signifiers? Laplanche says that it responds by taking the mass of what it cannot understand and making it unconscious" (Bersani et al., "A Conversation with Leo Bersani," 7–8).

8 Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* notes the openness of Laplanche's theory to "the encounter with another" (8).

9 For an account of *Orientalism*'s influences and legacy, both deliberate and unintended, see Brennan, "The Illusion of a Future."

10 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 72.

11 Chow, *Ethics after Idealism*, 2.

12 Said, *Orientalism*, quoted in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 73.

13 Chow, *Ethics after Idealism*, 75.

14 Said, *Orientalism*, 20.

15 Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, 44.

16 See, among many possibilities, Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*; Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*; and Williams, *Playing the Race Card*. In addition, there are numerous studies of ethnicity in American film that are relevant in this context: Chon Noriega's anthology *Chicanos and Film* and Rogin's *Blackface, White Noise* come to mind, in addition to the studies of Asian representation on film cited below.

17 On the representation of Asian America on film, see Wong's *On Visual Media Racism*; Hamamoto and Liu, eds., *Countervisions*; Feng, ed., *Screening Asian Americans*; and Studlar and Bernstein, eds., *Visions of the East*. Crucial studies that approach the topic of Asian American identity from a psychoanalytic perspective include Cheng's *The Melancholy of Race*, which identifies "racial melancholia" as a defining element not only of immigrant subjects but of mainstream Western culture; Eng's *Racial Castration*, which breaks ground in thinking Asian American subjectivity in its inextricable relation to gender and sexuality; and Shimakawa's *National Abjection*, which argues that the psychical trope of abjection drives the stereotyping of Asian Americans by looking at examples in theater and performance art. Finally, two indispensable historical sources about Asian America are Takaki's classic *Strangers from a Different Shore* and Chan's *Asian Americans*.

18 Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril,"* 2.

19 Ibid., 2.

20 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 18.

21 Ibid., 18–19.

22 Nakamura, "Cybertyping and the Work of Race in the Age of Digital Reproduction," 319.

23 Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 16–17.

24 DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language*, 133.

25 Hansen, "Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing," 63.

CHAPTER 1: THE ENIGMATIC SIGNIFIER

1 The original Lacan passage reads as follows: "Between the enigmatic signifier of sexual trauma and the term it comes to replace in a current signifying chain, a spark flies that fixes in a symptom—a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element—the signification, that is inaccessible to the conscious subject, by which the symptom may be dissolved" ("The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud," 431). The original French reads as follows: "Entre le signifiant énigmatique du trauma sexuel et le terme à quoi il vient se substituer dans une chaîne signifiante actuelle, passe l'étincelle, qui fixe dans un symptôme —métaphore où la chair ou bien la fonction sont prises comme élément signifiant,—la signification inaccessible au sujet conscient où il peut se résoudre" ("L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient, ou la raison depuis Freud," 177).

2 Laplanche, "Time and the Other," 254.

3 Laplanche, "Seduction, Persecution, Revelation," 169.

4 Laplanche, "The Drive and Its Source-Object," 127.

5 Fletcher, "The Letter in the Unconscious," 112.

6 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 6.

7 Press release, "Steve McQueen: '*Once upon a Time*'; '*7th November*'; '*Girls, Tricky*'; and '*Charlotte*,'" Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, New York (14 January–19 February 2005).

8 Laplanche, "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," 79.

9 Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis*, 45.

10 Ibid., 128.

11 Laplanche, "The Kent Seminar," 23.

12 Laplanche, "Time and the Other," 247.

13 Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 41.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 13.

16 Bersani and Dutoit, *Forms of Being*, 146.

17 Eng, *Racial Castration*, 5.

18 Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality," 643.

19 Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2.

20 Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter," 413.

21 Laplanche, "Transference," 226 n.15.

22 Laplanche, "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," 73.

23 Laplanche, "The ICA Seminar," 75.

24 Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*; see, for example, page 6, "the memory of the trauma acts like a foreign body," and page 290, "this material behaves like a foreign body."

25 Laplanche, "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," 65.

26 Laplanche, "Interpretation between Determinism and Hermaneutics," 159.

27 Laplanche, "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," 73.

28 Laplanche, "Interpretation between Determinism and Hermaneutics," 159.

29 Laplanche, "Implantation, Intromission," 133.

30 Laplanche, "Seduction, Persecution, Revelation," 173.

31 Laplanche, "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution," 81.

32 Laplanche, "Implantation, Intromission," 133–34.

33 Ibid., 135.

34 For an explanation of "full" or "true" speech, and its opposite, empty speech, see Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in particular 249–56.

35 See Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*; Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 149; Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*; Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*; Murray, "Wounds of Repetition in the Age of the Digital"; and Zwarg, "Du Bois on Trauma."

36 Laplanche, "Time and the Other," 247.

37 Laplanche, "Transference," 230 n.21.

38 Freud, "On the Mechanism of Paranoia," 175.

39 Eng, *Racial Castration*, 8.

40 Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy and the Other Woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," 130.

41 DeFrancis, *The Chinese Language*, 133. I arrived at DeFrancis's work through Chow, "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," 22 n.18.

42 Chow, "Introduction," 22.

43 Ibid., 10.

44 Ibid., 11–12.

45 Hansen, "Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing," 63.

46 Ibid., 49.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 52.

49 Ibid., 58.

50 Eisenstein, "The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram," 28.

51 Ibid., 29.

52 Ibid., 30.

53 Ibid., 32.

54 Ibid., 42.

55 Münsterberg, *The Photoplay*, 90.

56 Eisenstein, "The Cinematic Principle and the Ideogram," 40.

57 Ibid., 34.

58 Ibid., 34–35.

59 Ibid., 43.

60 Eisenstein, "Film Form," 130. This essay was originally a speech delivered in Moscow in January 1935 at the All Union Creative Conference of Workers in Soviet Cinematography, and it was published that year in *Za Bolshoye Kinoiskusstvo*.

61 Eisenstein, "Film Form," 141.

62 Eisenstein, "Film Form: New Problems," 141.

63 Ibid., 142.

64 Ibid., 142–43.

65 Ibid., 141.

66 Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses."

67 The Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang, who lived in Japan for a time and currently has a studio in New York, literalizes and takes up the mantle of this possibility in his *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 10* (1993). This project, a sort of combination earthwork and firework placed in the Gobi Desert to the west of the Great Wall of China, consisted of ten thousand meters of gunpowder set off in such a way as to extend the line of the Great Wall as a line of exploding light.

CHAPTER 2: THE SHANGHAI GESTURE

1 Stephen Silverman writes that "Grauman himself inaugurated the Chinese's forecourt, when he accidentally stepped into the wet cement. That happy gaffe led to a tradition with scores of stars in subsequent decades" (Silverman, Berger, and Conser, *The Last Remaining Seats*, 14).

2 Endres and Cushman in *Hollywood at Your Feet*, 45–47, note that whichever story is true, the four original sets of prints clearly date to 15 April 1927, and they belong to Grauman, Talmadge, Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks.

3 Helgesen, "Grauman's Chinese Theatre Hollywood."

4 One Asian American, the actor George Takai, is represented in the forecourt, where his signature appears alongside those of his *Star Trek* costars.

5 Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 129.

6 Ralph Flint, "News from the Hollywood Studios," *New York Times*, 19 July 1931.

7 Rony, *The Third Eye*, 175.

8 "King Kong," Prologue program (1933), American Film Institute Catalog, http://gateway.proquest.com (site visited on 25 October 2007).

9 Helgesen, "Grauman's Chinese Theatre Hollywood," 15.

10 Ibid., 24.

11 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 71.

12 In *Romance and the "Yellow Peril"* Gina Marchetti suggests that the film invokes "the threat posed by the Asian male to white women," and forms a counterpart to films that feature "the power of the lascivious Asian woman to seduce the white male" (4). She also notes that the film "can be looked at as a catalog of what society considers as sexual crimes, excesses, or perversions" (33).

13 The diversity of meanings that attach to oriental objects in *Broken Blossoms* might reflect an ambivalence about trade and exchange, given that Sino-American relations throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century were dictated by concerns about free access to ports and markets and a desire for parity with Britain in this regard. In 1899, the desire of the United States to secure access to Chinese ports and markets culminated in the Open Door Policy, which guaranteed noninterference with treaty ports in the various national concessions.

14 Naremore, *More than Night*, 225. Two other valuable essays that need mentioning in this context are Lynch's "Orientation via Orientalism" and Lott's "The Whiteness of Film Noir." Although Lott's essay focuses primarily on racial blackness, it presents a persuasive catalogue of racially coded motifs in examples of the genre from the 1940s, with a focus on the way that *noir* protagonists often become racially marked (Walter Neff's spreading stain in *Double Indemnity*); on the function of racially coded locations (the jazz club in *Dark Passage*); and on the way that marginal characters who are racially other often play overdetermined roles in the narrative (the domestics in *Mildred Pierce*). Finally, Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo in their excellent *Noir Anxiety* provide psychoanalytic readings of foreignness, particularly foreign language, in film noir, often by routing their examples through Kristeva's writings on the maternal voice.

15 Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," 183.

16 Breuer and Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, 86.

17 For a fascinating reading of the Maltese Falcon as object both virtual and actual, see Sobchack, "Chasing the Maltese Falcon." I am particularly drawn to Sobchack's claim that the falcon represents "the desire to desire itself . . . an *ur-Souvenir* of unfulfilled longing . . . a *meta*-object of desire" (239).

18 Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, 138.

19 Bersani and Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets*, 40.

20 Bersani et al., "A Conversation with Leo Bersani," 7.

21 Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir," 542.

22 Oliver and Trigo, *Noir Anxiety*, 46.

23 Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, 31.

24 Ibid., 32.

25 Ibid., 34.

26 In *Raymond Chandler and Film*, William Luhr references the "famous story about how neither Faulkner nor Hawks was able to figure out who killed the chauffeur, leading Hawks to wire Chandler, who replied that he did not know either" (123).

27 Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure*, 92.

28 See Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, 72–78.

29 *The Shanghai Gesture* — Script, from the play by John Colton, with the collaboration of Karl Vollmoeller, Geza Herczeg, James Cain, and Jules Furthman (undated). Margaret Herrick Library Special Collections, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Mike Mazurki Papers Box 4, f.1. Accessed 5 January 2007.

30 Colonel Jason S. Joy, Letter to Will H. Hays (22 October 1929). Margaret Herrick Library Special Collections, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Production Code Administration Files. Accessed 5 January 2007. Unless otherwise noted, all remaining archival documents cited here regarding *The Shanghai Gesture* are from this source and were accessed on the date cited.

31 Will Hays, Letter to Carl Laemmle Jr. (24 October 1929).

32 Various correspondence between Joy and Hays (October 1929); resume of Col. Jason S. Joy (31 October 1929).

33 Joy, Letter to Ted Herron (5 February 1930).

34 Maurice McKenzie, Inter-office memo to Lamar Trotti (6 May 1932).

35 Will H. Hays, Telegram to Harry M. Warner (17 July 1933).

36 *The Shanghai Gesture* is not the only film in which Sternberg turned Production Code limitations to his advantage. Lea Jacobs provides a detailed account of how, with *Blonde Venus*, industry censors unwittingly allowed Sternberg to represent "material the Code ostensibly forbade." Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928–1942*, 105.

37 Anonymous response by reader to the adaptation and treatment of *The Shanghai Gesture* sent by John Colton to Joy (8 March 1932).

38 Production Code Administration, Letter to Arnold Pressburger (21 June 1941).

39 T. K. Chang, Letter to Pressburger (16 July 1941).

40 Arnold Pressburger, Letter to Chang (22 August 1941).

41 T. K. Chang, Letter to Pressburger (25 August 1941).

42 Pressburger, Letter to Chang (22 August 1941).

43 In the original version of the script, which was alternately titled *Black Irish* and *Take This Woman (If I Should Die before I Wake)*, Elsa commits suicide, but the ending was changed at the request of the Hays office in order to satisfy the rule that characters must not evade justice through suicide. Harry Cohn, Letter to Joseph Breen (19 August 1946).

44 Telotte, *Voices in the Dark*, 68.

45 Kaplan, "The 'Dark Continent' of *Film Noir*," 198.

46 Kaplan notes that Rita Hayworth reportedly received a crash course in Cantonese from a tutor in preparation for her role: "According to information in the archives of The Academy of Motion Pictures, Rita Hayworth 'crammed' Chinese for her role in *Shanghai* . . . 'In preparation for this difficult characterization, Rita took three-hour lessons daily for five weeks from Wong Mee Loo, a teacher brought to Hollywood from San Francisco'" ("The 'Dark Continent' of *Film Noir*," 200 n.12).

47 Chow, "Violence in the Other Country," 351.

48 Oliver and Trigo, *Noir Anxiety*, 64–65.

49 Oliver and Trigo suggest that this scene may be read in terms of the uncanny: "As in Brecht's epic theater, the scene in the Chinese theater intends to open the door to the uncanny, to a new way of knowledge through the uncanny, knowledge that is both familiar and unknown, ours and foreign" (*Noir Anxiety*, 71–72).

50 In his analysis of *The Lady from Shanghai*, Deleuze associates the indiscernibility of water and mirror reflections with the facets of the crystal image. See Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 73.

CHAPTER 3: THE CHINATOWN SYNDROME

1 Žižek, "'The Thing That Thinks,'" 200.

2 Quoted in Eaton, *Chinatown*, 13.

3 Cawelti, "*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," 502.

4 Belton, "Language, Oedipus, and Chinatown," 945.

5 Ibid., 945–46.

6 Eaton, *Chinatown*, 43.

7 Ibid., 48.

8 Shetley, "Incest and Capital in *Chinatown*," 1102.

9 Man, "Marginality and Centrality."

10 Belton, "Language, Oedipus, and Chinatown," 946.

11 This scenario calls for an Oedipal reading, a good version of which Belton offers in "Language, Oedipus, and Chinatown."

12 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 19.

13 Barthes, "From Work to Text," 58.

14 Scholars who have remarked upon this bit of dialogue include Belton, who writes that "Polanski's racial humor is typically in poor taste, yet it serves to further integrate Orientalism into the larger thematic tapestry which links sight, vision, and knowledge" ("Language, Oedipus, and Chinatown," 940 n.9); and William Galperin, who interprets this scene as a meta-comment

upon filmic representation: "The alien other that has infiltrated our own . . . is 'bad for the glass,' bad for *mimesis*" ("'Bad for the Glass,'" 1157). I am essentially in agreement with Galperin's reading, except that I would interpret the mirror metaphor in a more Laplanchean way: the alien other spoils representation, but is also an inextricable facet of it.

15 Incidentally, Jerry Fujikawa had been interned at Manzanar; his story is told in his daughter Cynthia Gates Fujikawa's 1998 documentary *Old Man River*.

16 Here I refer to Freud's account in "On the Mechanism of Paranoia" of the transformations and projections that characterize paranoid structures in the Schreber case history.

17 Man, "Marginality and Centrality," 58.

18 Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, 123.

19 Oliver and Trigo, *Noir Anxiety*, 142. Oliver and Trigo also comment at length on the joke and read it through Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*—in their case, in terms of Freud's distinction between "bad jokes" and "successful jokes." Oliver and Trigo also note that many scholars, including Virginia Wright Wexman, James Maxfield, and John Belton (cited above) also comment on the joke, in particular the camera's placement within the scene.

20 Shetley, "Incest and Capital in *Chinatown*," 1097.

21 Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 45. Technically, Lévi-Strauss's terms refer not to the practices of choosing a lover or spouse who is near or distant from one's familial circle, but to the rules that govern such choices in various societies, which can be primarily "exogamous" or "endogamous." However, I follow convention in more recent scholarly work in using these terms to describe the behaviors associated with these rules.

22 Shetley, "Incest and Capital in *Chinatown*," 1100.

23 Prior to the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008, Andrew Jacobs reported that "in recent months, human rights advocates have accused Beijing of stepping up the detention and surveillance of those it fears could disrupt the Games. On Tuesday, President Bush met with five Chinese dissidents at the White House to drive home his dissatisfaction with the pace of change" ("China to Limit Web Access during Olympic Games," *New York Times*, 31 July 2008).

24 Anthony Ramirez, "On Canal St., Ferreting Out the Louis Vuitton Imposters," *New York Times*, 29 January 2006.

25 Larissa MacFarquhar, "Bag Man; A Report at Large," *New Yorker*, 19 March 2007, 126.

26 Paradise, *Trademark Counterfeiting, Product Piracy, and the Billion Dollar Threat to the U.S. Economy*, ix.

27 "Chinese Leader Begins U.S. Visit Today," *New York Times*, 18 April 2006.

28 Roger Parloff discusses the problem of third-shift manufacturing in "Not Exactly Counterfeit," *Fortune*, 26 April 2006. For example, he mentions a 1999 trademark infringement case brought by New Balance against Horace Chang, owner of a factory in Yan Jiang City, Guangdong Province, China, to which the athletic shoe corporation had outsourced manufacturing.

29 *Bach v. Longman*, 98 Eng. Rep. 1274 (1777).

30 Lessig, *Free Culture*, 66.

31 See, for example, Decherney, "Copyright Dupes."

32 Interestingly, Pan Am and Atari are not in fact Japanese corporations but rather are based in the United States, despite the fact that their names are associated with the East. In Pan Am's case, the association likely stems from the fact that in the prewar era Pan Am held a virtual monopoly on intercontinental and international air in the United States and was the first airline to offer commercial flights to China in 1934. The Atari Corporation, an early manufacturer of video game consoles, is named for a term used in the Japanese game of Go that is roughly equivalent to "check" in chess; it can also mean "hit" (as in a theatrical or movie hit). Both Pan Am and Atari suffered from what some have called the "*Blade Runner* curse," a bit of cult cinema lore derived from the fact that several of the corporations featured in the film's establishing shots went out of business or suffered setbacks after the film's release.

33 For a compelling analysis of how such immigration patterns relate to labor and colonialism on a global scale, see Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents."

34 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 14. The film includes the same text as a background voice-over during Deckard's initial scene at the noodle shop.

35 Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*. For a history of the Chinese Exclusion Acts and the effects of the various United States Immigration Acts of the twentieth century on Asian immigrants and citizens, see Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*; on the Immigration Act of 1965 in particular, see 419–22. See also Chan, *Asian Americans*, 145–65.

36 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 34.

37 Silverman, "Back to the Future," 111.

38 Žižek, "'The Thing that Thinks,'" 214.

39 Davis, "'Chinatown,' Part Two?" 67–68.

40 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 85.

41 Žižek, "'The Thing that Thinks,'" 200.

42 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 84–85.

43 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

44 Silverman, *Flesh of My Flesh*.

45 Lacan, "Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis."

46 There are many examples of this discourse in mainstream media, particularly surrounding education. Examples include the cases in the mid-1990s involving the University of California system and San Francisco's Lowell High School, a public magnet school where Asian Americans were disproportionately represented, as well as various lawsuits surrounding California's Proposition 209, which barred affirmation action and bans on racial preference in state and local government. On San Francisco and Lowell High School, see Nanette Asimov, "S.F. Schools Sued over Enrollment Restrictions, Chinese American Parents Seek Removal of Limits," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 July 1994, and Jill Tucker, "School Board Seeking an Assigning Policy That Factors in Race, Plan Developed in Closed Sessions Draws Criticism," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 November 2006. On lawsuits alleging reverse discrimination against white students in the University of California system, see Pamela Burdman, "Probe Finds No Reverse Discrimination at UC Berkeley, Report Comes Amid Debates over Preferences," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 March 1996. For a scholarly treatment of how the myth of the Asian American model minority sustains and intersects with United States imperialism, see Bascara, *Model Minority Imperialism*, especially chapter 1, "Unburdening Empire: The Cultural Politics of Asian American Difference."

47 Liu, *Copying Machines*, 44.

48 Bergstrom, "Androids and Androgeny," 38. Ironically, the original theatrical release cut of the film incorporates footage left over from this very film (Kubrick's *2001*).

49 Ibid.

50 I implicitly make this argument in the previous chapter in my discussion of the Shanghai gesture and Thomas Elsaesser's remarks on Hollywood melodrama. This argument also owes something to Paul Schrader, who suggests that film noir solves its problems through a "stylistic." Schrader notes that noir solves problems through lighting and shadow, to which I would add mise-en-scène and other elements of art direction. See Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," 56–57.

51 Wollen, *Paris Hollywood*, 124.

52 Bruno, "Ramble City," 62.

53 Ibid., 67.

54 Ibid., 68.

55 Wollen, "Fashion/Orientalism/the Body," 29.

56 Wikipedia's entry on *Blade Runner* lists a total of seven official versions of the film: the workprint version (1982); a San Diego sneak preview version (1982); the domestic cut (1982); the international cut, which in-

cluded more violent scenes than the United States cut (1982); the United States broadcast version (1986), which was edited to omit violence, profanity, and nudity; the Director's Cut (1992); and the Final Cut (2007) (http://en.wikipedia.org [site visited on 22 February 2008]).

CHAPTER 4: THE GREAT WALL

1 Antonioni frequently uses this camera movement when filming architecture, for example in *The Passenger* (1975) when his camera traces the outlines of a Gaudi apartment building. For a reading of this scene, see my essay "'All the Shapes We Make.'"

2 Bachmann, "Antonioni after China (Interview with Michelangelo Antonioni)," 30.

3 Bergstrom, "The Theater of Everyday Life," 47. I am doubly indebted to Bergstrom for this phrase, as it also informs my reading of Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*.

4 For further discussion of this point, see Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni, or, The Surface of the World*.

5 Bachmann, "Antonioni after China (Interview with Michelangelo Antonioni)," 30.

6 The Site of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party is still maintained as a museum at 76 Xingye Road, Shanghai. It features historic artifacts and documents the conditions of Chinese life under foreign rule that led to the founding of the CCP.

7 In "Violence in the Other Country" Rey Chow discusses a similar process that occurred in the 1980s with the Tiananmen Square student protests, which also produced, as a spectacle for the rest of the world, China as the place where violence happens in the name of democracy.

8 Abbas, "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions," 773.

9 Ibid., 774. I depart from the style of the rest of this book here to interject a personal anecdote that provides another example of Shanghai's internal discontinuity. My father, who was born in that city, has a childhood memory of seeing the film *Dumbo* (Disney, RKO, 1941) at a movie palace in Shanghai that was decorated with shiny blue mosaic tiles, perhaps in an appropriation of Hollywood's own appropriation of orientalist movie palace decor. In "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions," Abbas notes a related anecdote, which he culls from J. G. Ballard's autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun* (adapted as a film by Steven Spielberg in 1987). The anecdote Abbas cites concerns the Chinese premiere of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Dieterle, RKO, 1939; adapted from Victor Hugo's novel) at the Cathay Theater in Shanghai, which at that time was the largest cinema in the world. A prologue was performed at the premiere in the style of those that took place at

Grauman's Chinese Theater, and it featured two hundred real hunchbacks who were hired to perform as extras (775). In a bizarre twist, the Cathay Theater in Shanghai emerges as a simulacrum of the Chinese Theater in Hollywood. I cannot confirm when or whether the Disney film was in fact released in China, although it is listed as having been released in Hong Kong in August 1948.

10 Abbas, "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions," 774.

11 Lanham, *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, 3.

12 Zummer, "Leslie Thornton," 1.

13 Peckham, "Not Speaking with Language/Speaking with No Language," 182.

14 Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 187.

15 Ibid., 179–80.

16 Fletcher, "The Letter in the Unconscious," 116. I rely on Fletcher here and in the following chapter as one of the most astute interpreters of Laplanche's idiosyncratic notion of translation.

17 Caruth, "An Interview with Jean Laplanche," paragraph 108.

18 Fletcher, "The Letter in the Unconscious," 116.

19 Ibid., 117.

20 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 43.

21 Ibid., 60. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud also claims that groups are held together by Eros (31).

22 Carruth, "An Interview with Jean Laplanche," paragraph 107.

23 Alter, "Documentary as Simulacrum."

24 Elsaesser, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kleidern and Städten," 191.

25 Regarding the indexicality of the photographic image, see Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in which he calls the photograph a kind of "decal or transfer" of its object (14). See also Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, in which Barthes suggests that the photograph offers a "literal emanation of the referent" (80) and a "certificate of [its] presence" (87). In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag does not adopt a consistent position in favor of the photograph's ontological referentiality, as do Bazin and Barthes, but she does refer to this theory of photography as an established one. Sontag cites the photograph's acceptance as "evidence" or "proof" (5) and describes its "talismanic" qualities (16).

26 See, among many possibilities, Elsaesser and Hoffman, eds., *Cinema Futures*; Rodowick, *Reading the Figural*; and Manovich, *The Language of New Media*.

27 Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 165.

28 Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, 228. Metz's translator, Michael Taylor, translates Metz's term *construction en abyme* as "mirror construction." The term comes from the inescutcheon construction of her-

aldry, where it refers to a small shield placed at the center of a large shield, which is identical to the larger one except in scale. Metz's reading of Fellini emphasizes the way that mise-en-abyme may function to encompass seemingly contradictory elements into a unified whole, or at least to allow them to exist simultaneously (229).

29 For a reading of Oedipal structures and their permutations in other films by Wenders, see Gemünden, "Oedi-pal Travels." Gemünden argues that the United States is associated with the mother in Wenders's films, and that it is also the site of a nonpaternal masculine bonding.

30 Alter, "Documentary as Simulacrum," 140.

31 Contemporary discussions of piracy and trademark infringement of course tend to focus on China, not Japan. However, Yamamoto's jacket retains its value as metaphor for me when viewed as a response to the Western tendency to conflate different Asian cultures with one another.

32 In "Matter, Time, and the Digital," I also discuss the materiality of the electronic image and "digitality" through metaphors of the tactile.

33 It is important to recall that the garment industry—less in the high-end designer market, more so in the ready-to-wear category—relies increasingly on third-world and immigrant workers. Many of these workers are of Asian and Latina descent, and they labor in sweatshop conditions. Mike Davis notes in "'Chinatown,' Part Two?" that the local garment industry in Los Angeles thrived by creating "union-free, third-world conditions of labor within its specialty niche of women's sportswear production" during the 1980s, a decade "when other U.S. apparel centers, like Manhattan, were shrinking" (76). In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe references the lawsuit and campaign for back pay brought by the community-organized group Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) against the Lucky Sewing Company in California, which paid workers by the piece instead of by the hour, and she describes the discrepancies that arose with the "racialized, feminized labor" these workers performed (158).

34 Rickels, "My Last Interview with Ulrike Ottinger," 422.

35 Knight, "Observing Rituals," 111.

36 Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy and the Other Woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," 127.

37 See Kuhn, "Encounter between Two Cultures," 77.

38 Kaplan, "*Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," 7.

39 Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, 3.

40 Knight, "Observing Rituals," 110.

41 For a reading of *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia* that situates it in these terms, see Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy and the Other Woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*." For readings of *Madame X: An Absolute Ruler* that follow similar lines of argument, see White, "Madame X

of the China Seas," and Hake, "'And with Favorable Winds They Sailed Away.'" For readings of *Ticket of No Return* that center on female subjectivity, see Hansen, "Visual Pleasure, Fetishism, and the Problem of Feminine/Feminist Discourse"; Silverman's essays "From the Ideal-Ego to the Active Gift of Love" and "Narcissism." On *The Image of Dorian Gray in the Yellow Press*, see Mueller, "The Mirror and the Vamp." For a reading of *Exile Shanghai* that highlights the significance of a lesbian, feminist perspective, see Villarejo, "Archiving the Diaspora."

42 Knight, "Observing Rituals," 111.

43 Mueller, "Telling Wander Tales," 1.

44 See Trumpener, "Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia in the Mirror of Dorian Gray"; and Whissel, "Racialized Spectacle, Exchange Relations, and the Western in *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*."

45 Timothy Corrigan writes eloquently about spatio-temporal unmooring in Chris Marker's *Letter from Siberia*: "*Letter from Siberia* (1958) presents itself as an epistolary travelogue . . . Here too cold war, East/West, oppositions linger in the background . . . However, this essay film . . . pries open the temporal 'presence' of the moving images as an interstice (both spatial and temporal) containing multiple time zones ranging from past memories to future fantasies." Corrigan, "'The Forgotten Image Between Two Shots': Photos, Photograms, and the Essayistic," 55–56.

46 Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich, and the Masochistic Aesthetic*.

47 Longfellow, "Lesbian Phantasy and the Other Woman in Ottinger's *Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia*," 134.

48 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 223.

CHAPTER 5: THE LOST GIRLS

1 Sophie Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, 16.

2 Ken Johnson, "Sophie Calle—'Exquisite Pain,'" *New York Times*, 27 May 2005.

3 Laplanche proposes this second term as an English translation in his interview with Cathy Caruth, "An Interview with Jean Laplanche."

4 Trenchant critiques and rereadings of the female Oedipus complex are offered in Kristeva, *Desire in Language*; de Lauretis, *The Practice of Love*; and Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (in particular chapter 4, "The Fantasy of the Maternal Voice: Female Subjectivity and the Negative Oedipus Complex"). For a critique of the Oedipus complex based upon the structures it assumes regarding binary gender and sexual orientation, and the suggestion that we reread Oedipality as "triangulation" more broadly, see Butler, *Undoing Gender*, notably chapter 5, "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?"

5 Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 141–43.

6 Freud, "The Infantile Genital Organization of the Libido," 172.

7 Freud, "The Passing of the Oedipus Complex," 181.

8 Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," 188, 189, 191.

9 Freud, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," 193.

10 Freud, "Female Sexuality," 194.

11 Ibid., 197.

12 Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 34.

13 Silverman, "Girl Love," 19.

14 This is a key difference between Lacanian and object relations psychoanalysis. The former views the ego as a symptom-laden structure that essentially imprisons or freezes the subject and forms an obstacle to her own desire; the latter recommends the nurturing of the ego, under the assumption that it is a necessary component of functional subjectivity that is vulnerable to blows from the external world. A third position is offered by Leo Bersani, who theorizes a model of subjectivity that is predicated on neither lack nor egoic fullness, but posits instead a narcissistic subject who nevertheless extends outward (in a technically masochistic way) into the external world. See Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality," 641.

15 See, for example, Greg Forter, "Against Melancholia."

16 See Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, especially chapter 5, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification."

17 Caruth, "An Interview with Jean Laplanche," paragraph 124.

18 For a reading of a text that demonstrates a *non*-reciprocity between Orient and Occident, see Chow, "The Dream of the Butterfly." Chow reads David Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly* in this manner. See also Teresa de Lauretis's "Public and Private Fantasies in *M. Butterfly*," a reading of this touchstone film in which she claims that Cronenberg simultaneously "deconstructs and reappropriates the narrative of feminine love and honor," revealing it to be "a western patriarchal construct and orientalist fantasy" (124).

19 For a relevant analysis of this film, see Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience.*

20 Quoted in Abbas, "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions," 771.

21 Abbas, "Cosmopolitan De-scriptions," 771.

22 Ibid., 785.

23 Ibid., 786.

24 Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, 28.

25 Bois, "Paper Tigress," 37.

26 Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 129.

27 Ibid., 130.

28 Ibid., 140.

29 Laplanche, "The Wall and the Arcade," 202.

30 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 79.

31 Timothy Corrigan describes the properties of the photo-essay form in similar terms: the photo-essay is "built on linkage of separate photographs whose implied relationship appears in the implicit gaps or 'unsutured' interstices between those images." Corrigan, "'The Forgotten Image between Two Shots': Photos, Photograms, and the Essayistic," 47.

32 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 78, 73, 81.

33 Laplanche, "The Wall and the Arcade," 203.

34 Chow, *Primitive Passions*, 189.

35 On convergence culture, see Jenkins, *Convergence Culture.*

36 Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, 106–7.

37 Bersani and Dutoit read two of Caravaggio's *Fortune Teller* paintings through a notion of enigmatic signification in their volume *Caravaggio's Secrets* (15–18).

38 Calle, *Exquisite Pain*, 109.

39 Ibid., 111.

40 Yoshio Tsuchiya, review of *Lost in Translation*, trans. Fumie Nakamura, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 19 April 2004.

41 Kotaro Sawaki, review of *Lost in Translation*, *Asahi Shimbun*, quoted in V. A. Musetto, "'Lost' in Transition," *New York Post*, 21 May 2004.

42 Press release, "No Votes for 'Lost in Translation' Campaign," Asian Media Watch, 5 February 2004.

43 The term "Japandering" has been used to refer to the phenomenon of Hollywood celebrities appearing in Japanese advertising campaigns that they would not likely do in the United States due to the loss of cultural cachet associated with doing commercial work. For a collection of advertisements of this type, see Japander.com, http://www.japander.com (site visited on 11 October 2007).

44 Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts*, 25.

45 See Williams, *Playing the Race Card.*

46 Armstrong and Tennenhouse, *The Imaginary Puritan*, 204–6.

47 Sofia Coppola states that she and her father had "talked about the Suntory commercial idea, because [Francis Ford Coppola] and Kurosawa had done a Suntory commercial" (Olsen, "Sofia Coppola," 15).

48 Rickels, "My Last Interview with Ulrike Ottinger," 436.

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INDEX

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