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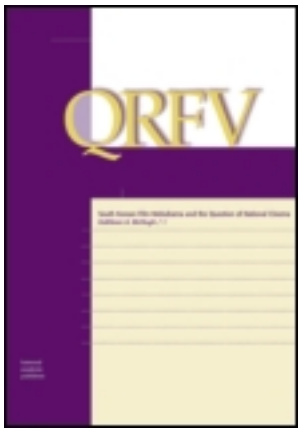

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Reconceptualizing national cinema/s

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Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s

Stephen Crofts

PART I. INTRODUCTION

1992: quincentenary of Europe's invasion of the Americas, year of Europe's anticipated economic union, year of fierce ethnic-religious conflicts in what were Yugoslavia and the Soviet "Union," and the year of Afro-American outrage at its abuse by a white American judicial system. A year, then, which exposes the exploitation of indigenous peoples, the perceived importance of supra-national trading blocs, the imposition of nationalisms on sub-national populations, and the violence inflicted on such groups in the name of "national unity." As a post-Enlightenment organizer of populations, the nation has recently been seriously frayed at its edges under the pressure of ethnic, religious, democratic and other forms of dissent, in particular consequent upon the disintegration of Soviet Communism and Pax Americana.

Analysis of national cinemas is the more urgent in the face of other major changes which have recently affected world cinema: the global spread of corporate capital, the consolidation of global markets, the speed and range of electronic communications (Hebdige 1990:v–vi). This essay seeks to theorize the global range of national cinemas in terms of the multiple politics of their production, distribution, and reception, their textuality, their relations with the state and with multiculturalism. These terms and their interactions constitute the basis of a project of disaggregating the term "national cinema" (the "national" especially should perhaps carry mental quotation marks throughout what follows). The essay limits itself to the feature film, and historically goes back to 1945, focusing in particular on recent years. This reconceptualization takes as axiomatic the issues set out by Andrew Higson as requiring address in considering national cinemas: the range of films in circulation within a nation-state, the range of sociologically specific audiences for different types of film, and the range of discourses circulating about film (1989:44–45), while recognizing that the second of these is amenable only to micro-analyses inappropriate to a synoptic essay such as this.[1]

PART II: VARIETIES OF NATIONAL CINEMA PRODUCTION

Especially in the West, national cinema production is usually defined against Hollywood. This extends to such a point that in Western discussions, Hollywood is

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hardly ever spoken of as a national cinema, perhaps indicating its transnational reach. That Hollywood has dominated most world film markets since as early as 1919 is well known (Thompson 1985; Guback 1976; Sklar 1975). Whereas in 1914 90% of films shown worldwide were French, by 1928, 85% were American (Moussinac 1967 [1925]:238). And for all the formal disinvestiture secured domestically by the 1948 Paramount Decree, transnationally Hollywood still operates effectively as a vertically integrated business organization.

Throughout most film-viewing countries outside South and Southeast Asia, Hollywood has successfully exported and naturalized its construction of the cinema as fictional entertainment customarily requiring narrative closure and assuming a strong individual—usually male—hero as the necessary agent of that closure. In anglophone markets especially, Hollywood interests have often substantially taken control of the distribution and exhibition arms of the domestic industry. Elsaesser can thus comment: "Hollywood can hardly be conceived. . .as totally other, since so much of any nation's film culture is implicitly 'Hollywood' "(1987:166).

In the context of such unequal cultural and economic exchange, most national cinema producers have to operate in terms of an agenda set by Hollywood—though, as indicated by the fourth variety of national cinema listed below, some Asian cinemas significantly maintain their own terrain. The political, economic and cultural regimes of different nation-states license some seven varieties of "national cinema" sequenced in rough order of decreasing familiarity to the present readership: 1) cinemas which differ from Hollywood, but do not compete directly, by targeting a distinct, specialist market sector; 2) those which differ, do not compete directly *but* do directly *critique* Hollywood; 3) European and Third World entertainment cinemas which struggle against Hollywood with limited or no success; 4) cinemas which ignore Hollywood, an accomplishment managed by few; 5) anglophone cinemas which try to beat Hollywood at its own game; 6) cinemas which work within a wholly state-controlled and often substantially state-subsidized industry; and, 7) regional or national cinemas whose culture and/or language take their distance from the nation-states which enclose them.

It should be noted at the outset that, as in most taxonomies, these categories are highly permeable. Not only do individual films cross-breed from between different groups, but a given national cinema, operating different production sectors, will often straddle these groupings. Thus French cinema operates in the first and third fields, with exceptional forays into the second, and Australian in the fifth and first with yet rarer excursions into the second, while Indian produces in the fourth, the first and the second. Moreover, the export of a given text may shift its category, most commonly recycling films of the second and sixth groupings as the first, as art cinema. In such cases, distribution and reception criteria supplant production and textual criteria. Part Three below will amplify the frequently depoliticizing effects of this shift.

A. European-Model Art Cinemas

This is, to most of the present readership, the best-known form of national cinema. Indeed, it constitutes the limits of some accounts of national cinema which

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collapse national cinema into the European art film flourishing in the 1960s and 1970s (Neale 1981). This model aims to differentiate itself textually from Hollywood, to assert explicitly or implicitly an indigenous product, and to reach domestic and export markets through those specialist distribution channels and exhibition venues usually called "arthouse." Outside Europe, the model includes, for example, the art cinema of India exemplified by Satyajit Ray, as well as the Australian period film.

Insofar as the discourses supporting such a model of national cinema are typically bourgeois-nationalist, they also subtend the European popular cinemas considered below. Those of the former are more elitist and more targeted at export markets for financial and cultural reasons. (This is not to say, of course, that popular cinemas do not seek out foreign markets.) National pride and the assertion at home and abroad of national cultural identity have been vital in arguing for art cinemas. Central, too, have been arguments about national cultural and literary traditions and quality as well as their consolidation and extension through a national cinema; hence the frequent literary sources and tendencies in this European model of national cinema (Elsaesser 1989:108,333).

Such arguments have issued in and maintained legislation for European cinemas of quality as well as European popular cinemas. The most meaningful legislation has been that for state subvention, directly via grants, loans, prizes and awards, or indirectly through taxation (the state in the post-World War Two period replaces the private patronage which outside Russia substantially supported the art/avant-garde cinema of the 1920s). State legislation has also been used to govern quotas and tariffs on imported films. These various legislative and financial arrangements allow for the establishment of what Elsaesser calls a "cultural mode of production" (1989:41–3) as distinct from the industrial mode of Hollywood. Though it depends on state subsidies—increasingly via television—this production mode is successful because of a meshing, often developed over decades, between economic and cultural interests in the country concerned. Such a mesh is less common in other modes of national cinemas considered below. Significantly, as elucidated by Colin Crisp, the French cinema—that most successfully nationalist of national cinemas—became so in the post-1945 era by virtue of its cinema workers' vigorous campaign against the post-Vichy influx of Hollywood films which obliged the government to impose a quota on Hollywood imports as well as box-office taxes to subsidize indigenous feature film production (forthcoming:Ch.2). A key variant affecting the success of an art cinema is the cultural status of cinema relative to other artistic practices in the country concerned. France rates cinema more highly than West Germany, for instance, with Britain in between, and Australia, adopting a European funding model, hovers near the bottom.

Textually, European-model art cinema has been typified by features such as the psychologized characterization, narrational ambiguity and objective verisimilitude noted by David Bordwell (1979 and 1985). And in defiance of claims that art cinema died with Tarkovsky, such textual features survive, with the metaphysics and the high-cultural address, in the work of Resnais, Rivette, Rohmer and newcomers like Kieslowski and Greenaway. But Bordwell's schema is modified by two factors. The supersession of early 1960s existentialism by later 1960s political radicalism and subsequent apoliticisms is one, pursued later. The other is Hollywood's development of its own art cinema. This has contributed to a blurring of

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boundaries between specialist and entertainment market sectors in its own market and abroad, and has weakened the assertions of independence made by other art cinemas. The generic mixing of Hollywood from, say, the early 1960s has been complicated by its interchange with European art cinema developments. Hollywood has developed its own art cinema after and alongside the spaghetti Western, Nouvelle Vague *hommages* to Hollywood genres and directors, Fassbinder's recasting of Hollywood melodrama and gangster genres and the adoption by such directors as Schlondorff, Hauff and Jodrell of Hollywood genres and modes of character identification to deal with nationally specific, West German and Australian issues. Penn, Altman, Schrader and Allen in the first wave all had their own favorite European influences, while a later star such as Lynch arrives with a more postmodernist pedigree, and Soderberg, Hartley and Stilman have more modest projects. A principal upshot has been a blurring of national cinema differences. Coupled with the aging market demographics of the European art film—the babyboomers forsake the cinema for their families—this blurring leaves these production sectors less able to differentiate their product from Hollywood's. Such insecurity is compounded by substantial American successes at recent Cannes festivals, long the preserve of European films.

While a politicized art cinema diverges from the metaphysical orientation of the textual norms cited above, state subsidy does impose limitations. Elsaesser neatly pinpoints the contradictions ensuing from state subsidy of a cultural mode of film production: it encourages aesthetic difference from the dominant (Hollywood) product, but discourages biting the hand that feeds it (1989:44). In the West German instance, this tension explains the adoption of political allegory as a mode of self-censorship, as variously seen in *Artists at the Top of the Big Top: Disoriented* (as regards state funding of film), *The American Friend* (American cultural influences in West Germany) and *Germany, Pale Mother* (recent German history and feminist readings of it). Left political films found their way through the liberal pluralist interstices of such cultural funding arrangements: for example, the critical realism of a Rosi or a Rossellini and the critical anti-realism of Kluge and Straub-Huillet. Godard, in the heady affluent days of turn-of-the-70s New Leftism, constituted a limit-case: on the basis of his cultural prestige as renowned art film director, he persuaded four television stations to finance ultra-leftist films, only one of which was then screened (Crofts 1972:37). Such explicit leftism partly borrows its discourses from, and marks a border zone between a European art cinema and the second mode of national cinema.

B. Third Cinema

1960s–1970s Third Cinema opposed the USA and Europe in its anti-imperialist insistence on national liberation, and in its insistence on the development of aesthetic models distinct from those of Hollywood and European art cinema. As Getino and Solanas proclaimed in their famous 1969 manifesto, "Towards a Third Cinema":

> While, during the early history . . . of the cinema, it was possible to speak of a German, an Italian or a Swedish cinema clearly differentiated from, and corresponding to, specific

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national characteristics, today such differences have disappeared. The borders were wiped out along with the expansion of US imperialism and the film model that it imposed: Hollywood movies . . . The first alternative to this type of cinema . . . arose with the so-called "author's cinema" . . . the second cinema. This alternative signified a step forward inasmuch as it demanded that the film-maker be free to express him/herself in non-standard language . . . But such attempts have already reached, or are about to reach, the outer limits of what the system permits . . . In our times it is hard to find a film within the field of commercial cinema . . . in both the capitalist and socialist countries, that manages to avoid the models of Hollywood pictures. (1969:20–21)

From the perspective of revolutionary, national liberation movements in Latin American, African and Asian nations, such an identification of "first" with "second" cinemas has an understandable basis in a critique of bourgeois individualism. For the existentialist-influenced "universal" humanism of much 1960s art cinema (canonically Bergman, Antonioni, Resnais) shares a Western individualism with the achieving heroes of Hollywood who resolve plots within the global-capitalist terms of a US world view.

Third Cinema has proven to be one of the more elastic signifiers in the cinematic lexicon. Some writers have tried to homogenize the enormously diverse range of Third World film production under its rubric (see Burton 1985:6–10 and Willemen 1987:21–23 discussing Gabriel 1982), while others have sought to build on the 1960s liberationist political moment of Getino and Solanas's manifesto, a moment extending well into the 1980s in ex-Portuguese colonies in Africa. Insofar as Third Cinema distinguishes itself politically and largely aesthetically from Hollywood and European art cinema models, its history has been a fitful one. In its concern with "a historically analytic yet culturally specific mode of cinematic discourse" (Willemen 1987:8), its radical edge distinguished it also from the bulk of Third World production, primarily devoted to comedies, action genres, musicals and varieties of melodrama/romance/titillation. Especially in the 1960s, such radicalism rendered Third Cinema liable to ferocious censorship. More recently, Third Cinema abuts and overlaps with art film's textual norms and, its militant underground audience lost, seeks out art cinema's international distribution-exhibition channels. Names such as those of Solanas, Mrinal Sen, Tahimik, Sembene and Cissé serve notice of the ongoing importance of Third Cinema as a cinema of political and aesthetic opposition.

It follows from its political oppositionality and Third World "national [cultural] powerlessness" (Stam, 1991:227) that funding for such cinema is highly unreliable. In the instance of films from impoverished, black African one-party states with few cinemas and minimal film culture, film subsidy is easier found in France, in Switzerland, or from the UK's Channel 4 and BBC2. Such production conditions give Third Cinema a more urgent intensity than the political allegories of West German cinema and raise vital questions about the cultural role played by First World financing of Third World cinemas. Rod Stoneman of Channel Four sounds an appropriate warning note on international co-productions: "Vital though the input of hard currency from European television may be, it is important that it does not distort the direction of African cinema" (quoted in Leahy 1991:65).

Discourses on Third Cinema undo many First World notions of national cinema, perhaps most strikingly the notion of national cultural sovereignty. As polemically

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adopted by the 1986 Edinburgh Film Festival Special Event on the topic, Third Cinema offered a particular reconceptualization of national cinema. It became a means of disaggregating the congealed stolidity of a British film culture unwilling to recognize in its midst a plethora of ethnic, gender, class and regional differences (Pines and Willemen 1989). The Event extended the definition of Third Cinema to take in, for instance, black British cinema. Another conceptual dividend of Third Cinema is its decisive refutation of the easy Western assumption of the coincidence of ethnic background and home. Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile, for example, produced a diasporic cinema. As Zuzana Pick notes: "The dispersal of filmmakers [. . .] made problematic their identification within the Chilean national and cultural formation" (1987:41). Similarly exiled have been such erstwhile Fifth Generation Chinese filmmakers as Wu Tianming, Chen Kiage, Huang Jianxin and Zhang Yimou, whose *Ju Dou*, co-produced with a Japanese company, is still banned in China, probably for its allegorical resonances of the 1960s–1989 period as well as for the expressed concern that it is a "foreign exposé" of a "backward China." And within their "own" countries filmmakers such as Paradjanov and Yilmaz Guney have been exiled and/or imprisoned. Such troublings of First World homogenizing concepts of nation will be pursued later.

C. Third World and European Commercial Cinemas

Art cinema and Third Cinema, the two best known reactions to Hollywood, do not exhaust the field. Both Europe and the Third World produce commercial cinemas which compete, with varying degrees of success, with Hollywood product in domestic markets. These cinemas, and all those considered henceforth, are less well-known than the first two because they are less exported to the European and anglophone film cultures which largely define the critical terms of national cinemas.

Much Third World production, as distinct from Third Cinema, aims, like European art cinema, to compete with Hollywood in indigenous markets—or, in Africa, with Indian cinema too—but it differs from European art cinema in being populist. This may be explained, in part, by lesser degrees of American cultural influence (that is, there is more screen space) and by the fact that local cultural elites outside Latin America are weaker and little concerned with cinema, thus encouraging lesser art cinemas. (Third World cinema here excludes China and Russia, considered later.)

European commercial cinema, however, should be treated here. It targets a market sector somewhat distinct from European-model art cinema, and thus vies more directly with Hollywood for box-office. Its most successful country has been France, where until 1986 indigenous cinema won out over Hollywood at the local box-office. French production, it might be noted, has partly dissolved the industrial/cultural distinction by successfully promoting *auteurs* within an industrial context. Other European commercial/art cinemas such as Holland's and Ireland's, based on small language communities, have a much more parlous existence, with production levels often tailing off to zero per year and with few

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exports. Typical genres of a European commercial cinema include the thriller, comedy and, especially in the 1960s, soft-core.

Excluding the booming economies of East Asia, the dependent capitalist status of most Third World countries, with stop-go economies and vulnerability to military dictatorships with short cultural briefs, rarely provides the continuous infrastructural support which nurtures indigenous cinemas. Economic dependency and hesitant cultural commitment typically promote private over public forms of investment which further weaken indigenous film production. John King notes the common failure in Latin America to bite the bullet for import quotas:

> [I]n general the state has been more successful in stimulating production than in altering distribution and exhibition circuits. The transnational and local monopolies have strongly resisted any measures to restrict the free entry of foreign films and have grudgingly obeyed, or even ignored, laws which purport to guarantee screen time to national products . . . [T]he logic of state investment was largely economic: to protect the profits of dominantly private investors. There are fewer examples of what Thomas Elsaesser calls a "cultural mode of production". (1990:248–9)

Throughout the Third World, with exceptions noted below, foreign (mainly Hollywood) films dominate local screens. Even in Turkey, where "film production was [. . .] neither dominated by foreign companies nor supported or tightly controlled by the state [. . .] the market was still dominated by the four or five hundred imported films (mostly Hollywood movies)" (Armes 1987:195–6). Uruguay represents an extreme instance, insofar as it has a dynamic film culture and almost no local production (King 1990:97). Yet that same film culture afforded more admissions to Solanas's *Tangos: El Exilio de Gardel* than to *Rambo* (Solanas 1990:115). Slightly differently, Tunisia has since 1966 hosted the significant Carthage Film Festival while having only some seventy film theaters, insufficient to sustain regular local production. In francophone black Africa, only recently has the French distribution duopoly been displaced, allowing the screening of more African films on African screens (Armes 1987:212, 223).

Countries of the East Asian economic boom clearly differ. While Japan is Hollywood's largest overseas market, in 1988 domestic product retained 49.7% of box-office (Lent 1990:47), specializing largely in softcore and adolescent melodramas (Yoïchi 1990:110). And South Korea in the same year battled the MPEAA to reduce Hollywood imports to roughly five per year (Lent 1990:122–3). As such, it broaches the category of "Ignoring Hollywood."

D. Ignoring Hollywood

In Paul Willemen's gloss, "some countries (especially in Asia) have managed to prevent Hollywood from destroying their local film industry" (1987:25). This option is open only to nation-states with large domestic markets and/or effective trade barriers, such as India and Hong Kong (there are some similarities between these countries and totalitarian cinemas considered below). In these Asian countries, culturally specific cinemas can arise and flourish. In Hong Kong, the national

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cinema outsells Hollywood by a factor of four to one. And in India the national cinema sells four times as many tickets per year as does Hollywood in the US. In 1988, a typical year, the Indian industry produced 773 films, 262 more than Hollywood. That Indian features are produced in some 20 languages for local consumption protects Indian films very ably from foreign competition (Lent 1991:230–1). And in the Hollywood vein—if less expansively—Bombay exports its product to Indian communities worldwide, just as Hong Kong exports through East Asia, dominating the Taiwan market, for instance, and to Chinatowns throughout the Western world. Furthermore, Indian cinema long colonized Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). All Sinhalese films prior to 1956 were made in South India, and "local actors were decked out as Indian heroes and heroines who mouthed Sinhalese" (Coorey and Jayatilaka 1974:303).

E. Imitating Hollywood

Some sectors of some national cinemas have sought to beat Hollywood at its own game—and overwhelmingly failed. Such aspirations have emanated largely from anglophone countries: Britain, Canada, Australia. In the memorable dictum of British producer, Leon Clore, "If the United States spoke Spanish, we would have a film industry" (quoted by Roddick 1985:5). State investment in the countries' film industries has secured relatively stable production levels, but has not guaranteed a culturally nationalist product. Anglophony has encouraged these nations to target the West's largest, most lucrative—and well-protected—market, that of the US. But these national cinemas have already had their indigenous cultural bases modified, if not undercut, by the substantial inroads made into domestic distribution and exhibition by Hollywood interests and product. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's provocative remarks on British cinema are yet more pertinent to Canada and Australia: "British cinema is in the invidious position of having to compete with an American cinema which, paradoxical as this may seem, is by now far more deeply rooted in British cultural life than is the native product" (1985:152). Already weaker than those of major European countries, the local film cultures of these anglophone nations have been further weakened through the 1980s by the unequal economic exchanges which have locked British, Canadian and Australian film production increasingly into dependence on the US market through pre-sales and distribution guarantees. For each success story like *A Fish Called Wanda* and *Crocodile Dundee* which have drawn on some local cultural values, there have been hundreds of films made in these lesser-player countries which, in trying to second-guess the desires of the US market, have produced pallid imitations. An index of the price exacted for the American/world distribution of *Crocodile Dundee* can be seen in the re-editing required by Paramount, which quickened the narrative pace and made the film look more like a wholesome family entertainment (Crofts 1990). A fantasy of a foreign market can, then, exercise an inordinate influence over "national" product.

The logic of such blithe bleaching-out of domestic cultural specificity can have two further consequences: the country may become an offshore production base for Hollywood—witness Britain, Canada, and Australia's branch of Warner Brothers'

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"Hollywood on the Gold Coast"—or Hollywood may exercise its longstanding vampirism of foreign talent (Prédal 1990). In the Australian case, all the major name directors of the 1980s have now moved to Hollywood, most without returning to Australia: the two George Millers, Peter Weir, Gillian Armstrong, Fred Schepisi, Bruce Beresford, Phil Noyce, Carl Schultz, Simon Wincer. Four leading Australian actors have now made the Hollywood grade: Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Bryan Brown, Colin Freils. Even that stalwart of Australian cultural nationalism, playwright and scriptwriter David Williamson, has been writing a script in Hollywood. Similarly Bangladeshi & Indian.

F. Totalitarian Cinemas

Sixthly, there is the national cinema of the totalitarian state: Fascist Germany and Italy, Chinese cinema between 1949 and the mid-1980s, and, of course, the Stalinist regimes of the Soviet bloc. By far the predominant mode of the Communist brand of such national cinemas has been socialist realism, which sought to convince viewers of the virtues of the existing political order (Crofts 1976). Peripheral to this core production has been the often political art cinema of Tarkovsky, Jancsó, Makaveyev, Wajda, various proponents of the Cuban and Czech New Waves, and Chinese Fifth Generation cinema. Such peripheral production has been conditional upon the liberalism or otherwise of national policies at the time, both as regards cultural production and the cultural diplomacy of products exported. A further aspect of any analysis of this mode of national cinema might seek to disentangle cultural specificities from the homogenizing fictions of nationalism. As Chris Berry notes in surveying Fifth Generation departures from the Han Chinese norm, there are "56 races in the People's Republic" (Berry 1992:47). The undoubted popularity of such Communist and also fascist cinemas might need to be mapped against the discursive regimes and the range of other entertainment, within and outside the home, offered by such nation-states.

G. Regional/Ethnic Cinemas

Given the historical recency of the disintegration of the nation-state and its forcefully homogenizing discourses and political sanctions, it is not surprising that ethnic and linguistic minorities have generally lacked the funds and infrastructure to support regional cinemas or national cinemas distinct from the nation-states which enclose them. Marvin D'Lugo has written of Catalan cinema as "something like a national cinema" (1991:131), but perhaps the best-known regional cinema, the Québecois, has benefitted from cultural and political support strong enough to propel its major name director, Denys Arcand, into international fame. Cinemas such as the Welsh have not achieved such prominence nor, within settler societies, have Aboriginal, Maori or Native American cinemas, nor indeed, within an immigrant society, has Chicano cinema, though Afro-American cinema reaches back to Oscar Micheaux and has broken into the mainstream with Spike Lee and others.

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PART III: MARKETING OPTIONS FOR NATIONAL CINEMAS

I separate out this topic from production to counter the still widespread tendency of film histories and theories to gloss over what for almost all cinema producers is a vital, if not the paramount factor in their calculations: namely, markets. While some sectors of national cinema production do not seek export—witness the German *arbeiterfilm*, most Chinese film and most "poor cinema"—a great deal of national cinema is produced for export as well as domestic consumption. National cinemas thus compete in export markets with each other and with the big other of Hollywood.

A. Exporting National Cinemas

Whereas Hollywood markets itself through well-established transnational networks and with relatively standardized market pitches of star, genre and production values, the export operations of (other) national cinemas are far more hit-and-miss affairs. Their three principal modes of marketing or product differentiation are by the nation of production, with different national labels serving a sub-generic function; by authorship; and for portions of art cinema, by less censored representations of sexuality, especially in the Bardot days of the 1950s and 1960s, but still now, as witness Almodóvar. All three modes of differentiation were, and remain, defined against Hollywood, promising varieties of authenticity and frisson which Hollywood rarely offered. As Hollywood sets the terms of national cinemas' self-marketing, so too does its market power and pervasive ideology of entertainment limit the circulation of national cinemas. In foreign, if not also in their domestic markets, national cinemas are limited to specialist exhibition circuits traditionally distinct from those of Hollywood product. These comprise arthouse cinemas—themselves recently increasingly blurred with mainstream outlets—film festivals, specialist television slots addressing middle- to high-brow viewers, and minority video and laser-disc product, not to mention other, rarer exhibition modes such as community, workplace and campus screenings.

Even for as grand a player as Hollywood, export markets can impose some limitations. Roger Ebert reports that Hollywood's persisting reluctance to figure non-white heroes is attributed within the business to the fact that export markets—despite often being less white than the domestic one—lag behind the temper of the US market (1990). So much the worse, then, for the export aspirations of culturally specific national cinema product. Few states substantially underwrite their export market operations. (The operations of, say, SovExportFilm until 1989 would repay detailed attention.) Distributor take-up of foreign film material for arthouse circulation frequently excludes the culturally specific. Thus New German Cinema is exported largely without Schroeter or Kluge, and Australian cinema almost entirely without the social realist film. Such exclusions can enable the resultant cultural constructions of the exporting country in terms of the sun-tinted spectacles of armchair tourism. At film festivals, a major meeting point of national cinema product and potential foreign buyers, the dominant film-critical discourse is the depoliticizing one of an essentialist humanism ("the human condition")

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complemented by a tokenist culturalism ("very French") and an aestheticizing of the culturally specific ("a poetic account of local life") (Boehringer and Crofts 1980). With its emphasis on "originality" and "creativity," it is this discourse of art cinema which can facilitate the representation of political film in the tamer terms of art cinema (Crofts and Ros 1977:52–4). As indicated above in "Imitating Hollywood," national cinema producers often cautiously bank on their foreign markets' imputed uninterest in the culturally specific. Without cross-cultural contextualization—a broadly educational project—foreign distribution of national cinemas, then, will tend to erase the culturally specific. One shrewd and successful strategy has been the combination of cultural universals (family madness, artistic ambition, rape) with specific local inflections effected by several Australian films of the last few years—*Sweetie*, *Shame*, *High Tide* and *Celia*—which successfully target European film and TV markets.

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B. Reading Foreign National Cinemas

The foregoing comments on the cultural selectivity of distributors' choices of films to import point to various possibilities of cross-cultural reception. Three features will be noted here: blank incomprehension; misreadings, usually projected appropriations; and the responses of producing countries to foreign praise.

Firstly, some local cultures can remain impervious to outside readings because producer and consumer share few or no cultural knowledges. A striking instance is the films made by the Navajo Indians with the anthropologists Sol Worth and John Adair (Worth and Adair 1960). Unexposed to film and television, the Navajos' innocence of close-ups gave non-indigenous American viewers no understanding of the need to focus on, say, a saddle blanket in the middle distance of a long-shot, while non-indigenous viewers' ignorance of the blanket's cultural significance gave them no purchase on the scene's Navajo meaning. Other examples include the rich cultural mythology of Latin American or Chinese films, religious emblems in Algerian or Iranian Muslim cinema, dance customs in Indonesian cinema, the cultural density of local reference in Kluge, or indeed the knowledge of African colonial French which enables one to know that the title of the film, *Chocolat*, is slang for both "black" and "screwing."

The second feature has been well characterized in Elsaesser's and Rentschler's analyses of the US appropriation of the New German Cinema (Elsaesser 1980:80; Rentschler 1982). Rentschler, for example, remarks on the tripartite process of US reviewers' ignoring both the cultural specificities and the production processes of the texts concerned, together with their corollary elevation of the author as prime source of meaning. As I have noted elsewhere, *Crocodile Dundee* offered its US viewers a new set on which to inscribe American frontier myths and to re-discover an age of innocence (Crofts 1992).

Finally, the third feature can be illustrated by two samples of producing countries' responses to foreign praise of their product. When a 1980 Cannes Prize for Supporting Actor was awarded to Jack Thompson for his role in *Breaker Morant*, the film was re-released, after an indifferent run in Australia, to unanimous critical praise, and went on to scoop 11 of 15 Australian Film Institute Awards that year

(Crofts 1980). *Red Sorghum*'s winning of the 1988 Berlin Film Festival's Golden Bear gave a fillip to its wide popularity with Chinese students and youth (Tian 1989).

Foreign constructions of nations will be crucially affected by national cinematic representations—alongside those of cuisines, football teams and so on. In line with Benedict Anderson, Philip Rosen has observed that "identifying the . . . coherences [of] a 'national cinema' [and] of a nation . . . will always require sensitivity to the countervailing, dispersive forces underlying them" (Rosen 1984:71). The nation can subsume into a fictional entity all manner of differences, across axes of class, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, cultural capital, religion, and so on. Discourses of national cinema reception tend to effect similar homogenizations, if only insofar as each film is seen as representative of the producing nation (desolate sunburnt landscape as a prime marker of Australian-ness, melancholic engagement with a traumatic history as index of German-ness, etc.). Such reductive national-cultural symbolizations crowd out more complex articulations of national identity. This tendency is challenged only at limit-case points where a politicized cinema explores differences of class, gender, ethnicity, region, etc., within say, the "United" Kingdom.

PART IV: CONCLUSIONS

Several film-historiographical and film-theoretical conclusions can be developed from the foregoing. In general, this essay seeks to enable a consideration of national cinemas in non-First World terms. This firstly requires acknowledging a wider range of national cinemas than is regularly treated under that rubric. Film scholars' mental maps of world film production are often less than global. Even as assiduously encyclopedic an historian as George Sadoul devotes more pages of his *Histoire du Cinéma* to the Brighton School and the beginnings of Pathé than he does to the whole of Latin American cinema between 1900 and 1962 (1962: 43–64, 421–37). As Edward Said magisterially demonstrates with reference to "Orientalism" as academic discipline and world-view, so the world-views of different national film cultures are substantially informed by their country's relations—military, economic, diplomatic, cultural, ethnic—with other parts of the globe (1985). Thus Sadoul, informed by French colonialism, knows more of African cinema than of Latin American, while an American scholar, informed by the US imperium and substantial Hispanic immigration, knows more of Latin American than African cinema, and a British scholar, informed by European and American cultural influences, may not see much outside that transatlantic axis. At the other end of the East-West axis, a hybrid, non-Eurocentric film culture such as the Thai—even if it does not as yet support substantial film scholarship—draws substantially on both Hong Kong and Hollywood sources as well as local production. Annette Hamilton thus remarks that "the average viewer in Thailand or Singapore has been exposed to a much wider range of visual material in style, genre, and cultural code that is the case for any 'average Western viewer' " (1992:91).

Such skewed world views will demonstrably influence canon formation in the country concerned. And given that Third World production—for that is the prime excluded category—is more plentiful than European and North American by a

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factor of more than 2 to 1 (Sadoul 1962:530–1), Luis Buñuel's trenchant comments on the canon of world literature could justly apply to that of world cinema:

> It seems clear to me that without the enormous influence of the canon of American culture, Steinbeck would be an unknown, as would Dos Passos and Hemingway. If they'd been born in Paraguay or Turkey, no one would ever have read them, which suggests the alarming fact that the greatness of a writer is in direct proportion to the power of his/her country. Galdós, for instance, is often as remarkable as Dostoevski, but who outside Spain ever reads him? (1984[1982]:222).

To pursue the question of canon formation in relation to national cinemas demands examination not only of historically changing international relations of the kinds set out above, and of the force of such institutions as SovExportFilm and the European Film Development Office in cultural diplomacy, but also of the taste-brokering functions of film festivals and film criticism.

The ongoing critical tendency to hypostatize the "national" of national cinema must also be questioned in non-First World terms. Not only do regional and diasporic cinema production challenge notions of national cinemas as would-be autonomous cultural businesses. So, too, Hollywood's domination of world film markets renders most national cinemas profoundly unstable market entities, marginalized in most domestic and all export markets, and thus readily susceptible, *inter alia*, to projected appropriations of their indigenous cultural meanings. Witness the discursive (re)constructions of national cinemas in the process of their being exported. Ahead of India and Hong Kong, Hollywood remains the big(est) other, the world's only film producer to have anything like transnational vertical integration of its industry. Study of any national cinema should include distribution and exhibition as well as production within the nation-state.

The nation-state itself has for a while been manifestly losing its sovereignty. It has been pressured both by transnational forces—canonically American in economic and cultural spheres, and Japanese in economic, and more recently, cultural spheres—and simultaneously by the sub-national, sometimes called the local. The multiculturalism, the cultural hybridity of the nation-state has increasingly to be recognized. Recent instances of assertion of ethnicity, for instance, center on linguistic rights and cultural protection: from the Spanish regular in public notices in American cities to people from the Iberian Peninsula who describe themselves as Basque or Catalan rather than Spanish; from the nationalism of Québecois cinema and Welsh programs for S4C in the UK to the substantial Greek video markets throughout Australia, especially in Melbourne, the third largest Greek city in the world. Minorities or majorities defined by political dissent, class, ethnicity, gender, religion or region are the everyday stuff of many people's lives: witness the five nations, three religions, four languages and two alphabets which went to constitute the "nation" Yugoslavia. Recall, also, from a 1962 essay by Leroi Jones (later Amira Baraka) called " 'Black' is a Country": "[T]he Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans who are news today because of their nationalism [. . .] are exactly the examples the black man [sic] in this country should use in his struggle for *independence*. (1968[1962]:84). Alongside such sub- and supra-national emphases, however, it is vital to recognize the political significance in other contexts, especially in developing countries, of rhetorics of nation and nationalism as means

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of fighting for independence from imperialist powers. Recall here the dominant genre of Vietnamese cinema, anti-imperialist propaganda.

Politics, in other words, is a matter of unequal distributions of power across axes of nation as well as of class, gender, ethnicity, etc. The political engagements that people do (or do not) make will vary with their social and political contexts, and their readings of those contexts. In considering national cinemas, this implies the importance of a political flexibility able, in some contexts, to challenge the fictional homogenizations of much discourse on national cinema, and in others to support them. And it would be foolhardy to underestimate the continuing power of the nation-state. To acknowledge these powers, by the same token, is not to disavow the cultural hybridity of nation-states; nor to unconditionally promote national identities over those of ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and the other axes of social division which contribute to those identities; nor, finally, to buy into originary fantasies of irrecoverable cultural roots, or into the unitary, teleological and usually masculinist fantasies in which nationalisms display themselves. That said, the struggle of many national cinemas has been one for cultural, if not also economic, self-definition against Hollywood or Indian product.

While cultural specificity, then, is by no means defined exclusively by the boundaries of that recent Western political construct, the nation-state, at certain historical moments—often moments when nationalism connects closely with genuinely populist movements, often nation-building moments (Hinde 1981)—national developments can occasion specifically national filmic manifestations which can claim a cultural authenticity or rootedness. Examples include some of the best known cinema "movements." Italian Neo-Realism, Latin American Third Cinema and Fifth Generation Chinese Cinema all arose on the crest of waves of national-popular resurgence. The French Nouvelle Vague marked a national intellectual-cultural recovery in the making since the late 1940s, whereas the events of May 1968 were more nationally divisive, leaving a clear political imprint in the works of Marker, Karmitz and Godard and Gorin markedly absent from the films of Rohmer or Malle. New German Cinema drew much of its strength, as Elsaesser has shown, from a 1960–1970s student audience and an allied concern to make sense of the traumas of recent German history (1989). The Australian feature film revival took off on a surge of cultural nationalism developing through the 1960s (Crofts forthcoming). Interestingly, such cinema "movements" occupy a key position in conventional histories of world cinema, whose historiography is not only nationalist but also elitist in its search for the "best" films, themselves often the product of such vital politico-cultural moments. As such, these are the films most frequently exported, and thus often occlude critical attention to films which may well be more popular.

In the context of the relations of unequal economic and cultural exchange obtaining between Hollywood and (other) national cinemas, the generation and/or survival of indigenous genres is a gauge of the strength and dynamism of a national cinema. Outstanding instances in non-Hollywood post-1945 cinema would be the Hong Kong martial arts film, the French (stylish) thriller of Chabrol, Beneix, and others, and in Britain, the Gothic horror film and the Ealing comedy. Less stable indigenous genres include the *Heimat* film in West Germany and the

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period film and social-realist film in Australia. A vital research area concerns the intersections between given genres and the national. A range of questions present themselves. For example: Under what conditions do culturally specific genres arise? How do imported (usually Hollywood) genres affect the generic range of a given national production sector? Does Chinese production even have genres?

The production category which most obviously confounds any attempts at a neat parcelling of "national" cinemas is of course the international co-production. This is more likely than not—and regularly so at the upper end of the budget range—to encourage the culturally bland. Nowell-Smith cites *Last Tango in Paris* as one of "a number of recent major films [that] have had no nationality in a meaningful sense at all" (1985:154). And Rentschler develops a pointed comparison between *The Tin Drum*'s easy generalities and the more demanding cultural specificities of *The Patriot* (1984:58–9).

Gloomy prognostications for a "Europudding" future of European co-production may well be exaggerated. For alongside directors such as Annaud, Besson, and Wenders, who, in *Variety*-speak are "a chosen few Euro helmers able to finesse international pics" (Williams 1992:31), there are to be reckoned the strong successes of such culturally specific product (co-produced or not) as *Toto le Héros* and *The Commitments*. While countries with smaller local markets will often use co-production agreements to recoup costs, in the lower and middle budget ranges this need not necessarily work against culturally specific interests. Co-productions are actively encouraged by the European Film Development Office's promotional support for films financed from three or more member countries, and the Office argues its respect for national cultural specificities (Schneider 1992). And international co-productions do positively facilitate the treatment of such supra-national ethnic/religious issues as are dealt with in *Europa, Europa*. The mesh, or conflict, between economic and culturally specific interests will vary with the interests concerned at a given point in time.

Latent in preceding sections of this essay have been some key theoretical assumptions, and this is the third respect in which cinemas need to be thought of less in First World terms. Gabriel and Stam have both critiqued the imperialist *données* of center/periphery theories as applied to film theory (Gabriel 1986; Stam 1991)—though it has to be said that, provided multiple centers be recognized, such theories are still crucial to understanding global economic *Realpolitik*.

Underpinning First World approaches to national cinemas is the master antinomy of self/other (the linguistic sexism, as will be seen, is adopted advisedly). This essay suggests the inappropriateness, in theorizing differences of nations and national cinemas, of what Homi Bhabha calls the "exclusionary imperialist ideologies of self and other" (1989:111). National cinematic self-definition, like *national* self-definition, likes to pride itself on its distinctiveness, on its standing apart from other(s). Such a transcendental concept of an ego repressing its other(s) urges abandonment of the self/other model as an adequate means of thinking national cinemas. For this dualist model authorizes only two political stances: imperial aggression and defiant national chauvinism. It can account neither for Third Cinema's move beyond what Solanas calls its "experimental" phase, nor for the existence of such projects as those of "Imitating Hollywood." Still less can it make

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sense of the hybridity of national cultures, including those of the notionally most pristine imperial centers. Trinh T. Minh-ha well characterizes the fluid, labile, hybrid nature of cultural identities:

> [D]ifference in this context undermines opposition as well as separatism. Neither a claim for special treatment, nor a return to an authentic core (the "unspoiled" Real Other), it acknowledges in each of its moves, the coming together and drifting apart both within and between identity/identities. What is at stake is not only the hegemony of Western cultures, but also their identities as unified cultures; in other words, the realization that there is a Third World in every First World, and vice-versa. The master is made to recognize that His Culture is not as homogeneous, not as monolithic as He once believed it to be; He discovers, often with much reluctance, that He is just an other among others. (1987:3)

With the recognition of ethnic-cultural hybridity, Bhabha notes, "the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of other people. It becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-one." (1990:301).

Along these lines, Rey Chow has made explicit the feminization of the oriental other which was implicit in Said (Chow 1991; Said 1985: 6,309). And from her work around *Yellow Earth* it is possible to elaborate a kind of hierarchy of othering processes which affect a Western reading of this film's Chinese 1930s female peasant protagonist: Western over Chinese, male over female, urban over peasant, present over past (1990:84). Such work offers sophisticated methodological counters to the projected appropriateness of most taste-brokers of foreign cinemas, who usually promote individual artistic creativity, and at a different discursive level, of Fredric Jameson's blithe determination that "all third world texts are necessarily . . . to be read as . . . national allegories," which elides not only individual creativity but also almost all local cultural specificities (1986:69).

NOTES

1. As regards the advisability of placing film within the "mediascape" of audio-visual provision in given countries, it should be said that the variety of such provision is enormous. While it may be relatively straightforward to map the cinema/television/video nexus in Western Europe—television being increasingly the primary producer and exhibitor of European-model art cinemas, with video as supplementary to theatrical screenings of a range of types of other films—other countries operate within quite different and less stable co-ordinates. Witness the rarity of broadcast television in poorer Asian, Pacific, and African countries, or the flourishing videotheques in Pakistan, Taiwan, Burma, Kampuchea and Vietnam which screen black market videos of films smuggled out of Thailand. These and subsequent examples point to very considerable national "mediascape" variations, but the scholarship which would support a fuller questioning here of the "cinema" in "national cinemas" is both too massive and too dispersed for the present project. I would like to acknowledge Thomas Elsaesser's raising of this issue when I presented an earlier version of this essay at his kind invitation at the University of Amsterdam, 16 January 1992.

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