
(UN)HOMELY CINEMA

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Abstract

This dissertation offers an analysis of the cinematic (un)homely. Loosely based on Freud's concept of the uncanny – that frightful and inexplicable experience of the home as a foreign and strange space – the (un)homely is a poignant sign of the times, a contemporary trope of the various kinds of spatial dislocation, transience, homelessness and disempowerment symptomatic of contemporary global societies. In short the (un)homely conjures up the decline of family, its faltering role as the moral center of the world and all the unpleasant ramifications that come from the destabilization of the home. The (un)homely speaks to the breakdown of what is deemed proper – the distinction between public and private space, the unraveling of gender norms, the troubling de-localization of mobile technologies.

While the uncanny nature of the home is a mainstay in many science fiction and horror films, my analysis uses the concept of the (un)homely to explore a wide range of contemporary films that explore every day domestic environments and the way the home is the site for a wide range of devastating intrusions – from the precarious nature of the nation in an age of globalization to the way mobile work seeps into the protective spaces of the home. These intrusions I contend provide themes and images related to the ways in which contemporary social relations, work and new technologies prevent characters from ever finding their way home. However, while an encounter with the (un)homely represents a painful experience with the loss of home, the (un)homely can offer an ethics of dwelling, as the impossibility of

narrative closure or the shift in power relations offer new and more hopeful ways of dwelling in the world.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse présente une analyse du « (un)homely » filmique. Vaguement basée sur le concept de Freud sur l'étrange – cette expérience inexplicable et effroyable du foyer familial vu en tant qu'espace étranger et bizarre – le « (un)homely » est un signe poignant des temps, un trope contemporain des divers types de dislocations spatiales, de déplacements, d'itinérance et de la privation de pouvoir, symptomatiques des sociétés globales contemporaines. En bref, « (un)homely » évoque le déclin de la famille, son rôle incertain en tant que centre moral du monde, ainsi que toutes les ramifications désagréables qui découlent de la déstabilisation du foyer familial. « (un)homely » fait référence à la dégradation de ce qui est jugé convenable – la distinction entre l'espace public et privé, le démantèlement des normes du genre, la délocalisation inquiétante des technologies mobiles.

Bien que l'étrange nature du foyer familial soit représentée comme un des piliers de base dans un grand nombre de films de science-fiction et d'horreur, mon analyse utilise le concept de « (un)homely » pour examiner un vaste ensemble de films contemporains qui explorent les environnements quotidiens et la façon dont le foyer est le lieu d'un ensemble étendu d'intrusions dévastatrices – allant de la nature précaire de la nation dans un âge de globalisation, jusqu'à la façon dont le travail mobile s'insère dans les espaces protégés du foyer. J'avance que ces intrusions procurent des thèmes et des images liés aux façons dont les relations sociales contemporaines, le travail et les nouvelles technologies empêchent les personnages de trouver à jamais leur chemin vers leur foyer. Néanmoins, bien qu'une rencontre avec le « (un)homely »

constitue l'expérience douloureuse de la perte de son foyer, « (un)homely » peut offrir une éthique du logement, étant donné que l'impossibilité de conclusion narrative ou le changement dans les relations de pouvoir offrent des façons nouvelles et plus optimistes d'établir une résidence dans le monde.

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Introduction

Going Home: The Problem of Dwelling in Contemporary Film

District 9 is a politically-charged science fiction film that was released in 2009.

Set in the volatile world of Johannesburg, South Africa, the film tells the story of a group of insectoid aliens who get stranded on earth when their space craft loses an important command module. Unlike most space invader films, however, which envision the presence of aliens as an imminent danger that must be combatted through the might of human technology and ingenuity, in *District 9* a different narrative trajectory is witnessed. Instead of the aliens posing a direct threat to the humans, the insectoids are actually portrayed as passive and docile creatures, who become homeless refugees. Indeed, when the aliens appear to possess no way of going home, their status becomes extremely precarious, as they are forcefully contained in a refugee camp called District 9; there they are treated as social outcasts and monitored by a brutal police force, which prevents them from mingling or associating with the outside world. In short, for the “prawns” the refugee camp is their new but inhospitable home, a slum that begins to overflow with crime, violence and brutality.

Released in 2008, *Summer Hours* is a French family drama that provides a calm and slow meditation on a sibling rivalry that ensues when a mother dies and leaves her country estate to her three children. For the mother, Helene, the status of her home is vitally important, since her estate is not only an immensely valuable shrine to the artistic accomplishments of her uncle (the home is littered with his paintings, furniture

and other artistic artifacts), but her dwelling is a domestic testament to the legacy of French cultural life. When the mother dies, however, the fate of the home is rendered uncertain. While Frederic, the eldest son, wants to hold onto the home, the other siblings propose to sell it and divide the money three ways. After all, since Adrienne spends most of her time in New York and Japan and Jeremie has taken a new job in China, neither of the other siblings feel that they would ever use the home. As Adrienne comments, “The house doesn't mean very much to me any more – France either.” Living and working all over the globe, Jeremie and Adrienne represent a world of geographical promiscuity, as their motility comes to speak to the way home today is not so much a specific, embedded place, but a network of sites that are traversed in time.

In the end, Frederic's plan is rejected. Since he cannot afford to buy the house himself, he has no choice but to accept the decision to divide up the home and sell it on the open market. And while some of the domestic objects end up in a French museum, where they may provide some reference to French art and culture, Helene's wishes are rejected, as the unity of the home, especially its status as a space of memory, is jeopardized by a world of transnational capital.

What could be the purpose of this odd juxtaposition of films? What does the strange insectoid world of *District 9* have to do with the serious and elitist world of high French culture? In short, while both films depend on very different stylistics, genres and cultural origins, both *District 9* and *Summer Hours* have this feature in common: both films use the figure of the disrupted and precarious home to depict a contemporary world where dislocation and homesickness are ever-present. After all, in both films, the home does not serve as an idyllic space of safety and personal

comfort; the home is not a stable zone that protects people from the outside. Rather, both films evoke (un)homely worlds, places that are vulnerable to attacks from the outside, or homes that imprison people rather than set them free.

In *District 9*, for example, homesickness is evidenced in the way the film explores the ever-present problem of forced migration. Here, the “prawns” extraterrestrial dislocation finds its counterpart in a global world plagued by political exile, as many must flee in order to escape the uncertainty of war, natural disasters, famine and racial conflict. Indeed, like so many victims of the process of diaspora, who must contend with making a home on someone else’s terms, the film’s depiction of the plight of the “prawns” shows how for many exiled people home can be quite alien. It isn’t just that the “prawn’s” home is heavily policed and ghettoized; the real (un)homely experience involves the way they have been silenced by the dominant culture, as the depletion of their cultural resources destroys their ability to make contact with both their home and past.

Like *District 9*, in *Summer Hours* the home’s destabilization involves the way national cultures are subtly undermined by transnational cultures and global motility. For Adrienne and Jeremie, their mother’s home is simply too French, too provincial, too connected to the past to match their international lives. But perhaps what is most striking about this film about sibling rivalries is the almost serene way in which the process of globalization dismantles and dis-unifies the home-land. The issues of globalization in the film, for example, are not depicted through a sentimental retreat into nostalgia. France is not painted as a lost cultural word that is colonized by some brute global process. Rather, everything seems destined to be this way. The uncle’s French art works are simply invisible remnants of a bygone age that has been eclipsed

by international products, like Jeremies' prized Puma shoes or Adrienne's Japanese tea set designs. Subsequently, while Frederic protests against his sibling's plans, he hardly becomes impassioned about the ordeal. Rather, the (un)homely encounter seems inevitable, as if giving up the home were a passing event in the lives of the family.

As both *District 9* and *Summer Hours* make clear, the (un)homely is a sign that no home is free from forces that threaten to disrupt or dismantle it from the outside. It is this idea of the cinematic (un)homely that will be the focus of this dissertation. More specifically, exploring the domestic worlds of a corpus of contemporary films, I will show how the cinema's representation of the (un)homely provides poignant themes and metaphors for the dislocated and precarious nature of contemporary life. Indeed, as a range of recent social, urban and political thinkers - such as Anthony Vidler (1992), Zygmunt Bauman (1999), Nicholas Royle (2003) and Homi Bhabha (2004) - have shown, the so-called post-modern world may be best defined as one plagued by homesickness, spatial dislocation and social displacement. As Bauman writes in *The Search for Politics*, the modern problem of alienation has been replaced by the post-modern problem of spatial dislocation, as the (un)homely creates an environment that renders impossible the task of forging any lasting sense of community:

Instead of 'alienation' we should better speak these days of 'unsettlement' or 'unhomeliness.' Indeed, 'alienation' presupposed a total world and a total person which could be estranged from each other, but neither does the multi-networked society offer much chance to be experienced as a totality nor do its modularized members have many occasions to develop the self-consciousness of total persons. For the 'modularized' residents of the 'multi-network' society, 'belonging' becomes a major problem; it is their daily concern in spite of (or rather because of) seldom finding a satisfactory solution, and hardly ever finding a solution which could be reasonably expected to be durable, let alone lasting forever (1999:160).

A term that has been intimately linked with Freud's (1919) essay "The Uncanny," the (un)homely signals the way the familiarity of the home can be troubled by various kinds of intrusions. For Freud the uncanny is the dreadful feeling of witnessing a familiar world (the home) become strange and unfamiliar. The uncanny is the uncertainty at the heart of the subject, an intrusion on the self that occurs from within. In cinema there are myriad references to this strange world of the uncanny. The science fiction film's array of freakish monsters and inhospitable aliens, the horror film's ghoulish encounters and haunted houses, the thriller's deranged serial killers - these are some of the most prominent ways in which the uncanny can be experienced in film.

However, while the cinema is rich with images of uncanny or abject homes, homes that are uncertain, vice ridden or corruptible, my analysis of the cinematic (un)homely will take a more geo-political trajectory, wherein the home and its disruption provide stories about how global processes can attack from afar. Instead of haunted houses, I will explore homes that are disrupted by global and technological motility, as global processes and mobile communications undo and blur the boundaries between inside and outside. Instead of pathological monsters, my reading looks at the devilish realities of modern work, the way the 24 hour work day renders static homes useless. Instead of the threat of the lunatic killer, my analysis goes into the everyday world of intra-family deception and the way mobile devices allow family homes to be overcome by cheating husbands, lies and other secrets.

In order to contextualize my analysis, in the remaining part of this introduction I will look at how the cinema's spatial concern with architecture, domestic spaces, urban environments and domestic objects provides a rich cultural imaginary, whereby

the (un)homely provides allegories for the dislocation of contemporary life. In the first part of this review, I will look at the cinema's response to the so-called spatial turn in social and cultural theory. Then I will look at some important ways in which the home has been treated theoretically in film theory, and suggest ways in which my analysis will differ from preceding studies. Finally, in conclusion, I will provide an outline of my chapters and my corpus of films.

The Spaces of the Cinematic (Un)Homely

In the last few decades, film studies has benefited from the so-called spatial turn in social and cultural theory, as the field has witnessed a growth in the use of various spatial and geographic theories and concepts. Nowhere is this critical spatial perspective in cinema more prevalent than with the unexpected rise in the study of the relationship between the cinema and the city. Just a decade ago, for example, David Clarke could bemoan the fact that, while it is clear that the cinema is deeply indebted to the development of urban societies, and while it is difficult to understand the rise of modern cinema without simultaneously attending to the development of modern cities, little theoretical explication of this fecund relation exists. As Clarke (1997) comments in *The Cinematic City*:

Yet despite the immediately perceptible cinematic qualities that cities frequently seem to possess, and despite the unaccredited role played by the city in so many films, relatively little theoretical attention has been directed towards understanding the relationship between urban and cinematic space (cf. Aitken and Zonn, 1994; Clarke, 1994). Indeed, whilst the histories of film and the city are imbricated to such an extent that it is unthinkable that the cinema could have developed without the city, and whilst the city has been unmistakably shaped by the cinematic form, neither film nor urban studies has paid the warranted attention to their connection. The city has certainly been understated in film theory. So central is the city to film that, paradoxically, the widespread implicit acceptance of its importance has mitigated against an explicit consideration of its actual significance.

Indeed, those film theorists who have sought to place the city in the foreground have been widely regarded as making an innovative argument...(1997:1).

How times have changed. Since this time there has emerged a rich body of research that takes quite seriously the relationship between urban and cinematic space.

¹ Turning around several key phrases that have become common currency within media and film studies, concepts like the “the cinematic city” or “the televisual city” continue to explicate the formal, thematic and experiential intersections between urban spaces and the cinema. Yet while the past decade has witnessed a surge in explications of the cinematic city, a large part of this “first wave” of scholarship can be grouped under the “Benjamin-Kracauer-Simmel” tradition of urban scholarship. Integral here is the idea that the cinema provides a rich archive for exploring the notion that the city is emblematic of modernity, a task that has dwelled on exploring the new modes of perception offered to the street-walking city-dweller. As Clarke writes regarding the affinity between Benjamin and the cinema:

Influenced by ideas associated with the Viennese school of art history (see Levin, 1988) - ideas formulated, as Lam (1995) notes, contemporaneously with the

¹ Indeed, almost every year sees the publication of another book that showcases some theoretical perspective on the cinematic city. The past few years have seen the publications of works such as Barbara Mennel's *Cities & Cinema*, Stephen Barber's *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space* and Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice's *Screening the City*, which provide a general overview of the key concepts and themes involved in studying both modern and postmodern cities. Other studies, like Nezar AlSayyad's *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from Reel to Real* and Katherine Shonfield's *Walls Have Feelings: Architecture, Film and the City* focus exclusively on the architectural relationship between the screen and the city. There is Paula J. Massod's *Black City Cinema: African American Urban Experiences in Film*, which takes a political approach to investigating the deeply important relationship between questions of race, urbanity and cinematic space. Finally, while in works such as Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice's *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* and Linda Krause and Patrice Petro's *Global Cities: Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age* issues of globalization takes center stage, with the cinema acting as the globalized cultural practice par excellence, in works like Murray Pomerance's *City That Never Sleeps: New York and the Filmic Imagination* and Lisa Odham Stokes and Michael Hoover's *City on Fire: Hong Kong Cinema* specific cities are used to explore how the cinema has had a sustained and profound effect on the imaginative life of local regions.

development of the cinema - Benjamin (1969) expanded upon and radically revised the notion that cultural transformations register shifts in sense perception, shifts which both issue from and continue to shape fundamental historical change: 'The film corresponds to profound changes in the perceptive apparatus - changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic' wrote Benjamin (1969: 250). The new technik of cinema - the German term evoking 'technology' as well as 'Technique' - registered such a shift in the field of human perception, one that worked to sensitize people to aspects of the world that had previously gone unnoticed; that were not previously recognized or even recognized as reality (1997:2).

Perhaps one of the most important books to explore the intimate relationship between the modern city and early cinema is Ben Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts*. In chapter 3, for example, Singer echoes Clarke's comments on Benjamin when he discusses the rise of the "the modernity thesis." As Singer writes:

In recent years, a number of film scholars, drawing primarily on very brief provocative comments in essays by Kracauer and Benjamin have embraced this idea. The argument, which has acquired the label "the modernity thesis," contends that cinema grew out of the perceptual dynamics of urban modernity. The thesis, in a nutshell, can be summed up by two assertions by Benjamin: "The mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence"; and "Film corresponds to profound changes in the apercptive apparatus.""" In other words, the urban environment of modern capitalism brought about some kind of fundamental change in the human "sensorium," creating a pervasive new "mode of perception" which ultimately had a significant impact on the development of cinema, encouraging cinema to take shape in ways that mirrored the fragmentation and abruptness of urban experience (2001:9).

Arguing that much of this earlier work on "perceptual changes" is fraught with ambiguities and ambivalent concepts, Singer's reworking of "the modernity thesis" is important for the way he provides a far more rigorous theoretical model to pin point exactly how the modern city brought about changes in human perception and how these alterations were registered in early cinema. However, despite this fecund assessment of how deeply intertwined modern cinema has been with the rise of urban space, a key spatial territory that has yet to be fully explored in this first wave of

scholarship is the figure of the “home.” That is, while a spatial mode of analysis has unlocked many of those hidden dynamics that reside between the cinema and the city, rarely do these studies explicitly take note of how the home relates to urban systems, contemporary cinema or the larger geo-political environment.

Indeed, as John David Rhodes comments, despite the cinema’s eclectic representations of the home, and its widespread appearance in many types of film, the figure of the home has rarely received the attention it deserves. As Rhodes writes:

Since cinema, in many of its dominant forms, is occupied with representing the lives of humans, and, since humans live, for the most part, in houses, the representation of domestic space is one of the many necessarily assumed burdens of the art form. Human habitation is, perforce, one of the persistent themes and preoccupations of the cinema. If we think of almost any genre—the melodrama, the horror film, film noir and its many cousins, or even, very often, the western—we are confronted immediately with the problem of how one is to live in a house, whether one is to live in a house—in one house or another, or even whether to live in a house at all... The very centrality of this problematic to our understanding of the history of cinema or the history of domestic space and housing and their representations is, I think, awesome when we begin to consider it. Awesome, as well, that it has been considered so seldom (2006:102).

Rhodes’ observation is telling. Just as David Clarke could bemoan the fact that film theory a decade ago had neglected the obvious relationship between cinema and the city, so we can point to the same kind of explicit neglect with respect to the figure of the contemporary (un)homely. For if the city is such a vital part of the history of cinema, the figure of the home is perhaps even more so, since its presence can be felt in a wide range of films. Fortunately, over the past few years, a few studies have emerged that have reinvigorated interest in the cinematic representation of homes and dwelling places. In the next few sections I will provide a general assessment of some of these works.

As a genre that focuses on the conflicts, crimes and passions that arise out of the domestic sphere, especially the archetypal middle class home, the melodrama is the cultural form *par excellence* that shows how the home can be disrupted by a range of intrusions. Indeed, while the home is supposed to act as the moral center of the universe, offering its inhabitants a safe place of refuge from the dangers of the outside, the genre's evocation of excessive drama, psychological maladies, female hysteria, wayward husbands, repressed desires and family greed, provide an extensive cinematic sign of the breakdown of the mythological family home. In short, everything in the melodrama points to the fact that the home is never what it claims to be, that the most dangerous disruptions come from within.

Since the 1970's there has been a scholarly reinvigoration of the melodrama, as the genre has been fruitfully examined in terms of the way its troubled sites of domesticity provide images, themes and metaphors for the way social norms, like gender roles, are articulated in terms of spatial environments and practices. While much of this research focuses on the suburban home,² the field of melodramatic studies can help to explore the social and cultural life of other kinds of homes. For example, in his short essay "The Geography of Melodrama, The Melodrama of Geography: The 'Hood Film's Spatial Pathos," Andrew deWaard convincingly argues that many recent melodramatic films offer critical perspectives on the way geographic spaces, like the urban home, are imbued with power and racial segregation. Indeed, deWaard's strong point, I believe, rests on how he shows how traditional definitions of the melodrama can be effectively adapted to explore other geo-political issues that

² See Lloyd and Johnson's "The Three Faces of Eve: The Post-War Housewife, Melodrama and Home," Landy's *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film & Television Melodrama* and Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts*.

fall outside the melodrama's association with the private sphere. Specifically, using many of the concepts put forward by Thomas Elsaesser (1987), deWaard shows how the contemporary melodrama need not be understood solely in terms of the family home. Rather if the idea of the home is extended to include racial groups or urban neighborhoods, the same private anguish and repression exhibited in the living room dramas of the melodrama can be analyzed in terms of the public devastation caused by urban policies that disenfranchise certain segments of the population. Here, deWaard's analysis, I think, points us in the right direction for examining the cinematic home as more than just the site of personal family conflicts, as the home can be seen as a broad figure for exploring contemporary spatial practices and discourses.

This question of how the home relates to genre is also taken up by Rhodes. For Rhodes, not only does the cinema provide a rich archive of different dwelling places and modes of domestic living, but each cinematic genre can be analyzed in terms of distinct ways of representing the home. As he writes, "I hope to show that it is difficult to think about genre without thinking about the way almost every genre embodies a mode of meditation on and use of the house and domestic space" (2006:85). Yet, as he shows with an analysis of the documentary *Grey Gardens*, sorting out which mode or mediation relates to which genre will be no easy matter: "In approaching the film through the lens of domestic architecture and domestic space, I hope I will be able to open the doors wider, so to speak, to think more broadly about what this film has to tell us about the entwinement of domestic space and cinematic space. While the film is, on one level, simply a documentary portrait of two women, it also lends itself to being interpreted as an exercise in genre or genres. Is this a domestic melodrama, shot through with intergenerational mother-daughter conflict? Is

it an exercise in gothic horror, a story about a big house and its historical hauntings? Is it a musical?” (2006:83)

The question of genre is not the only way we can explore the issue of the home in cinema. Indeed, since the (un)homely is a term that can be traced back to Freud’s idea of the uncanny, psychoanalysis represents perhaps one of the most rewarding approaches to the cinematic home. In *Home in Hollywood* Elisabeth Bronfen, for example, mobilizes a psychoanalytic framework to explicate the role Hollywood films play in articulating both the subject’s psychic angst and the “homely” techniques on which subjects rely to mend or heal their sense of dislocation. Crucial to this dual function of highlighting both problem and cure is the way Hollywood creates imaginary geographies - protective homes, comforting places or secure collectives - that, to borrow from Freud, return the subject to a state of homely familiarity. Working her way through both Lacanian and Freudian theory, Bronfen contends that at the heart of the subject is a world of perpetual uncertainty, where the subject’s authority and certainty over its own self-determination is constantly undermined by inexplicable forces that never conform to the subject’s self-presentation of the world. Thus, for Bronfen, the subject is constituted by an irreparable lack, a permanent state of homesickness, which the subject must try to remedy and restore through various illusions.

For Bronfen the question of what resources the subject can rely on to create a sense of home can be partially explained through the cinema. Films, especially Hollywood films, provide a public screen that articulates various fantasy scenes that provide the subject with some semblance of order and certainty. These imaginary geographies --whether they are in the form of a specific space in a film or a character’s

profound sense of attachment to a site - are reassuring because they provide the viewer with a space of familiarity and unity that the subject requires to mend their psychic disunity. However, while many Hollywood films, especially those that emphasize definitive and optimistic narrative closures, provide a familial geographic environment that can be substituted for the subject's inherent loss, these same films may confound the subject by showing the breaks and fissures that exist beyond the screen and the subject's spaces of enjoyment. As Bronfen writes:

If in the following readings I extend the notion of the family romance to include what I call the home romance, I do so in order to emphasize that fantasy work satisfies precisely because it produces protective fictions to ward off traumatic knowledge about the uncanniness that lies at the heart of all worldly emplacement. However, the happiness at the end of a cinematic narrative – notably the return to a familiar place, to the protection of the family or the successful couple building – as well as the pleasure that such resolution affords the spectator, remains aporic, for these narratives inevitably also render visible the fissure written into any notion of the recuperation of home (2004:25).

Through the textual analysis of various films, from Sirks' melodramas to the dark world of Gotham City, Bronfen provides an evocative overview of some of the most prominent ways Hollywood has constructed an imaginary geography, creating images of home that relate to the desire of characters and audiences to find some nostalgic sense of belonging. Yet, as Bronfen argues, no geographic places, whether they are real or imaginary, can ever provide an absolute zone of protection. As such, the cinema both testifies to and prevents the kind of closure associated with the familiarity of the home.

In his essay "Mainly in Cities and at Night: Some Notes on Cities and Film," Rob Lapsley co-joins Lacanian theory with Heidegger's philosophical analysis of Being to evaluate how the city forms a principal site for the subject's desire for completion and stability. Again, much like Bronfen's article, Lapsley's survey of the cinema's

imaginary geographies involves a binary system in which the screen offers both images of completion and ruination, both closure and fissure, as the subject grapples to order the fragments of the city. Unlike Bronfen, though, who looks at a range of cinematic homes, from the frontier home of the western to the sinister and abject abodes of the horror film, for Lapsley the subject's unease over encountering the uncanny is squarely positioned in terms of the city. As Lapsley writes:

The happening of the city is at once a metaphor and a site of this ruination. As metaphor the city is a process which always veers away from the form envisaged and desired by its creators, a process outrunning understanding and control, a process whose revenge upon its architects and planners undoes every dream of mastery. As site it is the space held open by Dasein's care, the envisioned space which shapes and is shaped by Dasein's projection of its future possibilities, the primordial space of which all others are an abstraction. Crucially it is one of the sites where Dasein is assigned the impossible task of putting right what can never be put right (1997:186).

For Lapsley the defining point of modern urbanity is a state of homelessness. "The city," Lapsley writes, "is the impossibility of home; although there was no home prior to the city a sense of homelessness is engendered by the city" (1997:193).

However, while the films analyzed by Lapsley shows the way cities persistently withstand and resist the ordering practices of their citizens, what is important about Lapsley is that he avoids simply equating the city with an inhospitable and inhabitable territory, showing how the city can equally become the home every subject dreams of inhabiting. That is, the city is both solution and cure, both the (un)homely Real that is beyond representation and the imaginary whole that the subject can identify with in an attempt to heal their uncertain existence.

This perspective on the city is found in the way Lapsley shows how the city can embody all three of Lacan's registers – the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary. "As imaginary, the city is the images and representations invoked to fend off the lack

introduced into the real by the symbolic. It is the bid to make whole, to suture the wound of urban subjectivity. Like the specular image the imaginary city is the attempt to overcome alterity by means of alterity, the attempt to complete what forever resists completion” (1997:194). Since Lapsley relies on Lacan’s theory of desire, which places the subject in an impossible battle with the task of filling the subject’s constitutive lack, the cinema’s ability to provide the subject with a sense of certainty and security is precarious at best. Yet, while the desire of home forms an impossible and insatiable trajectory, this does not mean that we should give up on finding some form of homely security. For while the prospect of finding an idealized world of impenetrable security is far from realistic, we still have some choice in which images of the home we will employ to live together in the city:

Amelioration is possible. Improvements in the physical environment and public services cannot abolish the *manque à être* but they can eradicate some of its forms and elsewhere render it less acute. Equally, the terms in which the *manque à être* is constituted can be altered. Given the lack in the Other all language has the structure of metaphor, and metaphors can be displaced. There is no necessity for the Other of the city to be metaphorised as an enigmatic woman (Faye Dunaway in *Chinatown*, 1974) or the real of the Other’s desire to be figured as the maniacal passion of a demented homicidal woman (Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*, 1987). Metaphors can be changed and happier economies achieved (1997:206).

Both Bronfen’s and Lapsley’s account of the home in the cinema provide interesting perspectives on how geographic places are intertwined with the subject’s economy of desire. Despite the success of these accounts, however, my analysis will differ somewhat from theirs. First of all, while my analysis will look at how the disruption to the home is related to questions of identity, agency and desire, I will not use a Lacanian or psychoanalytic framework to show how the subject can mend their loss through attachments to geographic places. Instead, using a geo-political conception of the (un)homely, I will frame my reading in terms of social, cultural and

urban theories that emphasize changes in contemporary capitalism, technology, work and consumption.

What I like about both these accounts has to do with their treatment of the ways in which an idea of home is bound up with the questions of narrative. In both accounts, the experience of “going home” is not only evidenced at the level of the film’s thematics or in the subject’s psychic development but “going home” also entails the passage of narrative. In his classic work on narrative, Tzvetan Todorov (1977) provides a qualitative understanding of narrative progression as a circular exchange between two distinct stages: all narratives rest on the transformation between a state of equilibrium and a state of disequilibrium. Furthermore, there is a specific temporal order to these qualitative transitions, which can be broken down into five separate stages of development. Stage one is defined by a state of equilibrium, in which the state of events conforms to some notion of normalcy. In stage two this state of security is undermined by an event that transforms the initial conditions into a state of disruption. Stage three involves the recognition of this new state of affairs. Stage four involves some form of reparation, as someone or something tries to grapple with the impending danger. And finally stage five involves a cyclical return, where the end of the story is marked by a return to a new state of order (Lacey, 2009: 29).

While not all narratives fall in line with these five stages, the perpetual shift between a state of stability and a state of disequilibrium is still a fundamental way of understanding narrative structures. In *The End: Narration and Closure in the Cinema*, Richard Neupert offers a semiotic reading of narrative closures, showing how there are a wide range of ways in which films can conclude: some films, such as those with closed endings, can be understood in terms of Todorov’s model, as the return to order

seals off the narrative possibilities, putting an end to any ambiguity; other films, however, such as those with open ended narratives, prevent a return to order and, as such, leave the viewer in a state of uncertainty (14, 15).

Framed in terms of the idea and experience of going home, the narrative movement between states of chaos, disorder and ambiguity and states of order, normalcy and familiarity offers another way to analyze the desire and search for home. Quite often, this passage towards narrative closure literally entails images of the good home. In the suspense thriller, *Klute*, for example, when the prostitute Brea is rescued from the crime and vice of the city by an idealistic detective, her new life and identity are framed in terms of arriving at a more savory domestic sphere. As the film closes we see Brea packing up her things, ready to move out of her New York apartment and join her man in the virtue of the suburbs. Here, the process of “going home” is a literal component of the narrative, as we witness Brea move from an independent, albeit dangerous, life in the city to the familiar spaces of domesticity.

But while narratives can be experienced as the movement towards home, quite often this passage can be complicated by the inability of closure, by elliptical narrative endings, or fissures in the story. Here, going home is presented as an impossible or improbable prospect since the narrative never arrives at any stable resting place. This kind of inability to make it home can be seen in the setting and closure of the film *The Road*. Based on Cormac McCarthy’s novel, *The Road* tells the grim story of the desperate attempt by a father and son to survive in a post-apocalyptic world. As the father and son make their way through a ravaged landscape, scourged by some mass fire, they not only have to contend with the hardship of a world where food and resources are rare, but they must remain constantly on guard against a dangerous gang

of cannibals. According to the father, however, all their woes will be overcome when they make it to the coast. But when the two finally arrive at their destination, the grim reality the two have encountered on their trip has not subsided; rather things become worse, as the father is taken ill and dies on the beach. As the film closes, the young boy is seen leaving with a new family. And while the boy's reconnection with another family unit provides the viewer with some sense of relief, we are left with the grave feeling that, for the young boy, life will continue as the same horrendous journey through a derelict wasteland.

In my analysis I will attend to the ways in which the films' mode of resolution – whether we arrive at a safe space of homely familiarity or are prevented from attaining any closure – relates to the theme and experience of the cinematic (un)homely. Indeed, as we will see, most of the films I analyze do not leave the viewer with any sense that the home's fragility will be repaired or remedied. Rather the disruption to the home seems inevitable and imminent. But while the image of the (un)homely may seem like a pessimistic experience, I think there is much to be gained from these encounters. For, while an encounter with the uncanny may lead to the desire to recuperate the idea of home, to retreat from the problems of the world into private enclaves, the (un)homely maintains an ethical dimension, wherein the home's de-stabilization can lead to new ways of thinking about and experiencing the place of home.

Chapters

Chapter 1 provides a theoretical overview of the concept of the (un)homely. While the concept of home has been employed in numerous fashions, becoming

anything from a sign of the nation, the imagination, identity, gender politics and the body, I argue that the image of disrupted and fragile homes offers poignant images, metaphors and themes for assessing the geo-political nature of contemporary societies, especially the way in which the daily use of mobile technologies alters a place-based definition of home.

To contextualize my use of the concept of the (un)homely, I begin with a brief overview of Freud's notion of the uncanny – a term that indicates the way the subject can suffer from an attack from within, as the familiar spaces of the home become the site for an unruly and indeterminate encounter with the return of the repressed. As a concept that indicates the way familiar spaces can quickly become inexplicable, the uncanny evokes a world of ghoulish hauntings, of unfathomable encounters with the strange and bizarre. Yet, while the uncanny is often referenced in terms of a cultural imaginary based on weird and haunted spaces, with the science fiction film and horror genre representing quintessential uncanny spaces, my dissertation will rest on a more geo-political reading of the (un)homely. That is, instead of using the uncertainty of the uncanny to look at questions of repression and subjectivity, my reading will fall more in line with a range of recent thinkers, such as Homi Bhabha, Nicholas Royle and Anthony Vidler, who offer a more social and geographic approach to the (un)homely.

For example, borrowing from Freud's concept of the uncanny, Bhabha's notion of the (un)homely centers on the question of what it means to live in a world of constant spatial dislocation, a world where political uncertainty, forced immigration, global mobility and estrangement are fundamental experiences of global geo-political societies. As one of the most important contemporary post-colonial thinkers, Bhabha's notion of the (un)homely speaks to the historical reality that for many home

is never simply where the heart is, but “going home” rests on the forced need to find a home in someone else’s territory. How, in other words, does one find a home in a place that is not your own? How can one feel connected and integrated in a place that is alien and strange?

But while the (un)homely poignantly captures the precarious nature of the post-colonial experience, this does not mean that it cannot be used to analyze other social and political phenomena that fall outside the issues of immigration and post-colonial up-rootedness. As Bhabha writes in his essay, “The World and the Home,” [a]lthough the “unhomely” is a paradigmatic post-colonial experience, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of historical conditions and social contradictions (1992:142). Using this more broad notion of the (un)homely, I will analyze a corpus of films that show how the home is subject to a series of internal and external intrusions, as the domestic sphere is depicted as bearing the brunt of a range of “global” and “technological” forces, from the erasure brought about by the process of global gentrification to the fleeting and mobile nature of contemporary work.

Throughout my dissertation I will take a broad perspective on the cinematic (un)homely. That is, rather than explore a corpus of films that use the home to explore a specific geo-political issue, such as the nature of global gentrification, I wish to show how the cinematic (un)homely speaks to a plethora of issues and that representations of the “unruly” home are never simple and straightforward. Rather, to quote Bhabha again, the (un)homely is a figuration that can “negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a *range* of historical conditions and social contradictions.” Thus, in each of my chapters I have chosen films that will anchor a separate issue that can be

loosely referred to under the banner of postmodern society. My point is to show that while the idea of the (un)homely succinctly evokes the problems of global migration, and the disorientation and estrangement that comes from a modern world plagued by war, poverty, terrorism and unemployment, the term can also be used to critically analyze other spatial discourses and practices.

Just as many of the key discourses on modern and postmodern space emphasize experiences of homesickness, strangeness, and dislocation, the cinema is also a rich resource for images and themes of homes gone awry. From sci-fi images of the home under attack by alien invaders to the domestic woes and vice of the suburban melodrama, the cinema has invested strongly in painting the home as space constantly undermined by internal and external threats. Rather than look at those genres traditionally associated with the filmic uncanny, such as the horror film or the sensationalistic political thriller, the films I analyze can be referred to as films that evoke the “everyday reality of the (un)homely.” That is, in the film I study the experience of the (un)homely involve the rituals of everyday life, especially the way local places, architecture and domestic interiors can be subtly unhinged and disrupted by forces from the global “elsewhere.”

In chapter 2 the (un)homely will be explored in terms of Krzysztof Kieslowski’s television series *The Decalogue*. Airing first in Poland during the late 80’s, the television series has gone on to receive critical acclaim, as it has become one of Kieslowski’s most important fictional works. Not only did the series initiate his move away from the social documentary, but the show became the first of a series of works that garnished an international following. But while *The Decalogue* has attained much of its critical attention from the series’ explicit biblical references and metaphysical issues,

I argue that what is really at stake in *The Decalogue* is a poignant social critique of the geo-political changes affecting modern Poland as it verges on the brink of a capitalistic revolution.

In short, the home in the series provides an extended metaphor for the nation and its precarious place in a new global order. This can be found in Kieslowski's decision to set the entire series in a desolate apartment complex in suburban Warsaw. As a form of the famous communist block housing projects, I argue that the apartment complex can be seen as a complex metaphor for the anxieties and hope surrounding Poland's entrance into a multinational culture and economy. Whereas in socialist times the housing unit represented the glory of modern technology and the promising future for the whole of Polish society, in *The Decalogue* this urban dream is depicted as a failed project. Subsequently, as the dreary and neglected home of a plethora of troubled characters, whose families are in a state of decline, the apartment can be read as the decline of this socialistic past and the centrality of the nation.

While the apartment complex evokes the failed legacy of Poland's socialist past, in the series it also points to a nation on the verge of change. This is revealed in the form of various recurring material signs, such as passports, international money orders, personal computers, airports, television screens, telephones, western consumer products and advertisements – which indicate how the solidarity of Poland's national identity is threatened by a new geo-political identity. Focusing primarily on episodes 6 and 9, I will elucidate the mediatory significance of these material signs. Key themes to be discussed include: Kieslowski's recurrent interest in the problem of communication and distance (a theme persistently evoked through the breakdown of

various communication technologies) and Poland's entrance into a multinational society of mobility, tele-presence and technological surveillance.

Chapter 3 considers how the notions of old and new media relate to issues of gentrification, urban collectivity and the development of community life. Here the figure of the (un)homely will be explored in terms of the precarious role architecture plays in the construction of collective memories and the stories people tell themselves to create a sense of belonging. However, while the role architectural forms, especially historical buildings, play in creating a sense of belonging has been well documented, I will address how issues of the built environment are complemented by media practices, especially amateur films. My central film of analysis will be Michel Gondry's comedic film *Be Kind Rewind*. Set around a series of decaying and abject spaces in Passiac, New Jersey, Gondry's film tells the story of how a local run-down video store is saved from the colonizing forces of global gentrification through a local film initiative that sees the revival of analog video as a vital solution to the problem of how to mobilize collective identities.

In line with Gondry's low-tech approach to film construction, what is interesting about this story of amateur filmmaking is the way the characters do not use the latest digital technologies to make their films (an act that would align the digital revolution with a renewal of participatory politics). Instead the film delves into the world of obsolete media, showing how the return of abject media, like analog video, can provide critical media practices that are embedded in specific places. Indeed, by showing how the demand for the "new," whether it be in terms of new design practices or media technologies, is imbricated with forms of social and cultural power,

Gondry's film invites us to consider both how media cannot be divorced from space and how progress and change involve different orders of time.

Chapter 4 looks at the changing nature of work in the mobile society, especially how the rise of the 24 hour worker has led to the blurring of the boundaries between the spaces of work and the spaces of home. I begin by showing how under, modern work conditions, the home was conceived of as a necessary safety zone that helped men deal with the burdens and stress of industrial society. However, while a good home life was seen as the reward or payoff for participating in capitalistic work, the status of the home raises serious questions about gender power: where did women retreat to in order the stresses of modern domestic labor?

Analyzing the romantic comedies *Punch Drunk Love* and *Up in the Air* I then turn to look at how under contemporary work conditions the aforementioned status of the home changes. In short, both films explore what Brian Masummi (1993) refers to as the ubiquity of postmodern work, a reality where the division between leisure time and work breaks down. I will argue that this breakdown leads to an encounter with the (un)homely. Two significant themes will be addressed in terms of this shift in the eruption of the (un)homely. The first involves changes to consumption. In both films, domestic consumption is no longer seen as a reward for work but a kind of work in itself. This is evidenced in the way both films look at how ubiquitous loyalty programs, like airmiles promotions, become for the protagonists a kind of new labor, as they spend their leisure time in search of brand loyalty gifts. The second theme involves the notion of the mobile home. Since both films emphasize characters who are obsessed with work and have very little need for traditional domestic spaces, they both show how more space-bound definitions of home are inadequate in a world of

perpetual movement. In its place the films insist that mobile homes- a transient kind of home that is designed for people on the go- are the best alternatives for a society obsessed with speed and migration.

Chapter 5 deals with the (un)homely in terms of the ever-present melodramatic issue of infidelity and the marital woe that comes about through cheating husbands. However, instead of exploring the break-up of the family home in terms of the more sensationalistic and emotionally-charged themes of morality, desire and repression, my analysis will seek to show how deception in the domestic home can provide an allegorical map of the structural and spatial changes brought about by the shift to a mobile techno-society.

Specifically, through an analysis of Feng Xiaogang's *Cell Phone* I look at how the everyday usage of mobile technologies, such as cell phones, leads to new forms of intra-familial surveillance and deception. Here, the (un)homely will center on questions of gender and sexual power, and, especially, on the ways in which access to the domestic home is through various form of information and communication devices. With this emphasis on communication technologies, the central question of the film becomes not only how family surveillance involves monitoring the bodies and sexual life of the other, but how cellphone habits become sophisticated tools for concealing and disclosing pertinent domestic information about the dweller.

My primary conceptual sources for this chapter will be Ned Schantz's (2003;2008) notion of the Ideal Hollywood Telephone - an ideological apparatus that envisions telephone technologies as providing perfected and transparent forms of communication. In short, the ideal phone represents a patriarchal activity that insists on controlling the circulation of information. However, while *Cellphone* will show how

men attempt to control their mobile lives, this prospect is constantly undermined by the disruptive figure of contingency and coincidence. Thus, instead of the men being able to control their domestic spaces, using the technology to both keep up the pretense of marital fidelity and engage in their secret lives, the unruly figure of chance will problematize the ideal phone, creating a range of uncanny experiences that destabilize the certainty of the home.

Chapter 6 provides an analysis of Laurent Cantet's eerie family drama *Time Out*, a film which co-joins the main themes of chapter 4 and 5. On one hand, the film explores the fragile nature of contemporary work, especially the rampant fear of unemployment. This is evidenced in the desperate and pathological measures Vincent, a middle class unemployed middle manager, takes in order to retain his role as the patriarchal head of the household. Indeed, as the viewer quickly learns, Vincent has not been promoted to a new prestigious job in Switzerland but has taken to an aimless life of driving recklessly around the French countryside. Unable to deal with the monotony and dissatisfaction of modern work, Vincent's precarious life on the road is designed to provide him with a much needed time-out; yet, by unhinging himself from the safety net of the family, Vincent's mobile life will end up pushing him further away from his family to the point where the home is transformed to an uncanny space of uncertainty.

In a concluding chapter I will summarize the main arguments of the dissertation.

Chapter I: An (Un)Homely Theory

Home or Homes: Reading the Cinematic (Un)Homely

In the classic horror film *The Haunting* (1963), an old gothic mansion becomes the menacing site for a tragic encounter with the uncanny. Indeed, for Eleanor Lance, a young nervous woman who arrives at Hill House to participate in a series of paranormal experiments, the house's disturbing and unruly presence proves deadly. Taunted, provoked and threatened by the home, Eleanor suffers a psychological meltdown and, in a moment of haste, dies in a horrendous car crash. The house, it seems, had it in for Eleanor right from the beginning, treating her as if it were she, and not the home, that was the subject of Dr. Markway's scientific experiments. Even when she arrived at the mansion on the first day, the home's ominous presence was made immediately apparent. As the camera veers up toward a menacing-looking exterior, Eleanor declares frightfully, "It's staring at me, vile, vile. Get away from here, get away at once."

But despite her clear warning calls, despite her knowledge that this is no ordinary home, Eleanor, it seems, must venture inside. For, while Eleanor will hesitate and consider retreating, in reality she has little choice. As she is painfully reminded, Hill House is not just the site of a series of experiments in the paranormal; nor is it some creepy old home with a lurid past. Rather Hill House is her last hope at a good life: having suffered a maladjusted home life, where she was forced to take care of an overbearing mother, Eleanor has come to Hill House to make a fresh start, to begin a new life freed from the restraints of her domestic obligations. In short, despite all the

tortuous games the home plays on her, Eleanor needs to be at Hill House, needs to find some place to call home.

Like so many other haunted houses, Hill House is a not merely a physical structure that contains the massive threat; it is the threat itself; it can see and act, it can rumble and shake, it can play games with people's minds and sanity. But while Hill House forms a quintessential space for an experience with the cinematic uncanny, the home also provides a lesson in the semiotic polyvalence of reading the (un)homely. For if the home is for Eleanor an impossible place, a home that rejects her desire to take up residence in the sordid estate, for the other characters who reside in or near the mansion, the meaning of the home varies greatly. For the people in the town, the mansion is a unwelcome sign of its violent past; for the doctor it is a space that will help prove his belief in the paranormal and catapult him into the world of scientific distinction; for the doctor's wife it is a sign of public embarrassment, a ridiculous obsession that will potentially ruin her husband's career; and finally for Luke, who is expected to inherit the mansion, the home is an invaluable resource that will make him rich.

Thus, while the mansion undoubtedly belongs to the gothic imaginary, its alternative meanings shows how reading the home constantly varies according to one's position and point-of view. In short, there is no single home in the film, but many homes. In their article "Reading the House: A Literary Perspective," Kathy Mezei and Chiara Briganti emphasize the manifold nature of the home in the literary imagination. Tracing the polyvalent use of domestic architecture in literature, they show how the home has been vital to the development of the modern novel and much literary interpretation. As they write: "The house and architecture have served as

foundational, powerful, and recurring analogues throughout the history of literary interpretation: thus, Walter Pater proposes the term literary architecture (1903, 20), Henry James his house of fiction (1934, 46), Gaston Bachelard the poetics of space (1994), and Edith Wharton her House of Mirth ([1905] 1987). In *Literary Architecture*, Ellen Eve Frank outlines how this habit of comparison between architecture and literature extends from Plato to Samuel Beckett and discovers particular expression in the late nineteenth and on to the twentieth century” (2002: 838).

For Mezei and Briganti, reading the home is a vital and eclectic task that allows the critic to uncover what it means to inhabit social and cultural space. For in encountering the domestic world one does not merely find a plethora of everyday objects and furnishings; rather the banal, habitual spaces of the home offer a rich environment that “can tell us much about the space we live in” (2002:838). As such, the home is always more than a physical structure. Reading the home or the (un)homely is a means by which to apprehend the social, cultural and economic institutions of a time and place.

Here, for example, are some of the ways Mezei and Briganti situate the home within the literary imaginary: it has been a sign of the rise of the middle class home, especially the desire for the establishment of a private interior that can ward off the dangers of the outside public; it can be read as a spatial sign of the gender wars, as the home’s division into “male” and “female” spaces becomes analogous to the gendered division in labour and the forging of social and sexualized identities; the home resounds with nationhood, wherein the creation of the cozy, well-secured domestic interior can be read in terms of the imaginary construction of the nation-state; “in another archetypal iteration, houses also represent the human body itself or its

extensions: House, body and mind are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishing, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, moulding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold within its bounds"(2002:842). And, finally, the home is the world of imagination itself, the site of literary creation. The home is, as Bachelard indicates, a "topography of our intimate being. By associating houses with childhood, dreaming, and memory, heemphasizes the significance of dwelling places in the evolution of a literary imagination. Our imagination, our consciousness, needs to locate itself in a particular space, to find a home, to articulate its homelessness, its longing for home, its sick-ness for home (nostalgia). Thus, novels and houses furnish a dwelling place-a spatial construct-that invites the exploration and expression of private and intimate relations and thoughts"(2002:839).

In short, for Mezei and Briganti reading the home and homesickness always entails encountering numerous dwelling places, sites that bring to the surface a range of social, political and cultural experiences. This polyvalent meaning of the home has also been succinctly referred to by Michael Inwood in his overview of Heidegger's concept of the uncanny. In "A Heidegger Dictionary," Inwood shows how for Heidegger the ideas of dwelling and homelessness are crucial concepts that conjoin a range of ideas, experiences and emotions. As Inwood writes:

Heim is 'home, dwelling-place'. It engenders Heimat, 'home-(town), homeland' (cf. LH, 335/242). It also generates adjectives: heimisch once meant 'belonging to the home', but is now 'indigenous, native, local, etc.' and also 'familiar, at home' as in being or feeling 'at home' in a place, a language, etc. Heimlich too once meant 'belonging to the home, familiar', but acquired the meaning of 'hidden, secret(ly)' and has lost its link with Heim. Another Heim-derived adjective, geheim, suffered the same fate, and now means 'secret', with Geheimnis, a 'secret, mystery' (1999:97).

As in Mezei and Briganti's survey of the "literary home," Heidegger's philosophical reading of *heimat* entails a plethora of meanings: the home can be an actual place, like an apartment complex or a single family home; it may represent a larger geographic entity, such as the nation state. It may be taken to mean the feelings of familiarity, routine and habit that comes with domestic life; or it may mean to share a common language or system of beliefs. Finding a home may signify the feelings of being secure and stable, as in the idea that the private sphere is a haven or zone of protection that keeps at bay the threats of the public world. It may also indicate a sense of sharing or commonality and the passion one may feel towards a specific real or imaginary community, as in the saying, "the home is where the heart is." Lastly, the home may be a local place – "the native soil" - which can be contrasted with exterior, remote, global or foreign spaces.

While, the home functions as a stable ground and is the space that the subject constantly strives, the real condition of dwelling in the world, for Heidegger, entails an encounter with the un-homely or the uncanny. Again, as Inwood summarizes, the uncanny is an experience that does rest on a monolithic definition, but is a term that conjure up a wide range of connotations:

Unheimlich, strictly 'not belonging to the home', does not mean 'unconcealed', but 'eerie, sinister, uncanny'. Thus 'in Angst one feels "unheimlich"', it gives one the creeps. But "Unheimlichkeit" here also means not-being-at-home' (BT, 188, Cf. XX, 400ff.). Haus is 'house, home', 'To be at home' is zu Hause sein or zuhause sein. Thus 'not-being-at-home' Nicht-zuhause-sein. In THEY-dominated everydayness DASEIN feels at home. Angst disrupts familiarity and 'being-in enters the existential "mode" of the not-at-home [Un-zuhause]'. Homelessness is our primary condition and impels us to seek a home...This homelessness drives man on to 'the conquest of the planet Earth and the venture into cosmic space' (1999:97).

Thus, if the home represents a local place that is associated with feelings of belonging, security and certainty – the home as the ground for being in the world – then the (un)homely represents the disruption of stability, the feeling of insecurity and the ungrounded. On the point of the local, for example, if the home is the native soil from which we gain our sense of self-identity, the (un)homely may represent a non-place, as in the idea that the global system represents a homogenization of experiences that takes away the particularities of the native. Likewise, if the home is a site of belonging, the (un)homely is a state of alienation, a feeling of being strange and unwanted. And, finally, if the home is a grounded space that provides stability by being immobile, the (un)homely captures the feeling of being always in motion, to be always in a state of up-rootedness.

It is clear that when analyzing the home and the (un)homely multiple perspectives and critical tools are required. However, while it might also appear that the home must be read in contrast to the (un)homely, such that the (un)homely emerges as the absence or the impossibility of home, such a binary opposition betrays the complexity of mapping the cinematic (un)homely. In her book *Space, Place and Gender*, Doreen Massey argues that while the concepts and experience of home and homelessness are important to deciphering the impact the global system has on questions of identity, culture, social identification and gender, it is important that neither term be set off against the other. This is especially true in terms of the way much contemporary social and cultural theory uses concepts like the (un)homely or homelessness to paint an inhospitable picture of modern and postmodern life.

As Massey argues, there is some truth to claims that the process of globalization leads to various modes of spatial upheaval, insofar as the size and scale

of the world system leads to a general condition of un-homeliness, to a world where the sustainability of local places is usurped by globalisation's new spatial mode of productions. For Massey, at the heart of this change in the geographic nature of production and circulation is the way social relationships are no longer tied to particular places (i.e. national or regional economies) but are stretched out across various global places. As Massey writes,

But whatever the importance of these new localisms - and it is disputed- they are occurring in a context of a truly major reshaping of the spatial organization of social relations at every level, from local to global. Each geographical 'place' in the world is being realigned in relation to the new global realities, their roles within the wider whole are being reassigned, their boundaries dissolve as they are increasingly crossed by everything from investment flows, to cultural influences, to satellite TV networks. Even the different geographical scales become less easy to separate - rather they constitute each other: the global the local, and vice versa. Moreover, as distance seems to be becoming meaningless, so relations in time, too, are altered. Before the 1970s companies made mayor investment decisions every few years and reviewed prices once a year; exchange rates changed roughly every four years, interest rates perhaps twice a year. All this now seems incredibly slow and ponderous - we get news of exchange-rate changes four or more times a day; prices are highly mobile; investment decisions (which may mean whole factories opening and closing) are made at least once a year (1994:161).

According to Massey these changes in space and time have led many to argue that we are living in an age of perpetual homesickness. Massey traces this sentiment to a range of contemporary theorists, especially Frederic Jameson and David Harvey, who describe the postmodern condition as one fraught with spatial fragmentation, speedy real-time communications, flexible accumulation and new placeless communication technologies (1994:165). While Massey agrees with many of these claims, especially the way social relationships can be stretched out over vast geographic entities, she cautions about over exaggerating this state of homesickness. Though the contemporary age is dominated by global modes of production, the shift towards a mobile culture is not entirely new; rather international flows of people,

capital and goods have been crucial to early developments in modernity. Early modern film, for example, has always been involved in an international sphere of trade and commerce, whereby certain movies have been circulated through a range of international destinations.

Likewise, while the home constitutes a vital site for the construction of social identity, feelings of attachment and community, we must be wary about how we define the home. It is easy, Massey contends, to paint an overly nostalgic image of the home, to see the home as a specific place, where community is natural and the product of geographic proximity. It is easy to imagine that, in a world where dispersion is vital to the function of global capital, only the (un)homely predominates. But, as Massey argues, this easy contrast between some lost home and the postmodern (un)homely need not be the case. For instance, while the home is commonly associated with a fixed and stable geographic place, there is no reason why the home has to be a localized place. Home does not equal presence; dwellings can be forged from afar, and community can be created as virtual or imaginary places. Neither does the idea of the home need to be framed in terms of a safe and stable environment that is opposed to the dispersal, fragmentation and mobility of global capitalism. As bell hooks writes, “At times home is nowhere. At times one knows extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever-changing perspectives, a place, where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. One confronts and accepts dispersal, fragmentation as part of a new world order that reveals more fully where we are, who we can become, an order that does not demand forgetting” (1990:148).

Like bell hooks, Massey contends that the possession and dispossession of the home depends on one's perspective, where one is positioned in terms of the history of spatial dislocation and upheaval. As she writes with reference to the postcolonial works of bell hooks and Toni Morrison, "[t]he point, however, is that much, if not all, of what has been written has seen this new world from the point of view of a (relative) elite. Those who today worry about a sense of disorientation and a loss of control must once have felt they knew exactly where they were, and that they had control. For who is it in these times who feels dislocated/placeless/invaded? To what extent, for instance, is this a predominantly white/First World take on things?" (1994:165).

Massey raises some interesting points about how the concepts and feelings of homesickness and the un-homely are far from universal or dominant. Rather, for her, the dispossession of home depends on a range of factors like gender, race, culture and geography, factors that show that the home is not simply set in opposition to the (un)homely, such that home is the celebrated term in the binary set. She asks whether, as a term indicating an unruly experience, an unsettling of space, the (un)homely might be a liberating experience? Can't one make a home on the move? And isn't the home equally the site of a painful process of alienation (1990:170-172).

In the next few sections I wish to examine some of the complexities observed by Massey by offering a broad theorization of the (un)homely. In doing so I wish to not only elaborate on some of the diverse ways in which the concept of the (un)homely has been used in recent social and cultural theory, but I will outline how I intend to map the cinematic (un)homely. Furthermore, since much of the recent work of the (un)homely stems from Freud's seminal 1919 essay "The Uncanny," I will begin with the Freudian uncanny. After delineating the significance of the Freudian

uncanny, I will then broaden the concept by showing how the basic eerie and destabilizing effects of the uncanny can be helpful in mapping contemporary social experience.

From the Uncanny to the (Un)Homely

Published in 1919, Freud's essay "The Uncanny" represents an early interdisciplinary encounter between psychoanalysis and literary criticism. Indeed, while Freud's central aim was to show how the eerie and creepy feelings associated with the uncanny could be explained through psychoanalysis, especially in terms of the subject's libidinal economy, the prime sources of his study came from the field of literature, especially the uncanny stories of E.T.A Hoffmann. In Hoffman, Freud observes, the frightening experience of being unsure of one's surroundings abounds, as the author depicts a range of weird situations (strange automata, waxwork figures, mental illness, epileptic fits), that take the reader into the haunted spaces of modernity. By evoking the literary world of the uncanny, Freud's essay thus can be read as vital contribution to modern aesthetics, as his desire to understand those frightening and uneasy feelings and emotions associated with the uncanny depends as much on the narrative constructs of the literary imaginary as they do on the new science of psychoanalysis.

If Hoffman represents the central literary source for the Freudian uncanny, it is the critical works of the psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch that provide Freud with the initial conceptual terrain to be used for his own unique understanding of the uncanny. In 1906 Jentsch published "Über die Psychologie des Unheimlichen" (translated as "On the Psychology of the Uncanny") an essay that, for Freud, situates the uncanny explicitly in terms of intellectual uncertainty. That is, whereas *heimlich* or the homely

represents a familiar world in which the subject knows what to expect and is in command of its perceptions, the uncanny arrives when the subject is confronted by the unfamiliar. As Freud (1919) writes, “On the whole, Jentsch ... ascribes the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one’s way about in. The better orientated in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it.”

However, while feelings of intellectual uncertainty represent a good opening conception of the uncanny, for Freud, Jentsch’s definition is unsatisfactory. “Naturally not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening....Something has to be added to what is novel and unfamiliar in order to make it uncanny.” A trip to another country, for example, invariably provides the traveller with many unfamiliar encounters, new sites, sounds and tastes that hardly count as uncanny experiences. As such, the feeling of uncertainty and unfamiliarity may be components of the uncanny experience, but they cannot be seen as the principle cause of the uncanny.

To provide a more accurate depiction of the uncanny, Freud then turns to linguistics and explores how a range of different languages define the uncanny. In Latin, French, English, Greek and Hebrew, it seems, what one repeatedly encounters is not simply a case of intellectual uncertainty. Rather, the uncanny conjures up range of ghoulish and frightening associations – from ghastly feelings of dread to actual haunted houses. Yet while these languages all provide vivid and eclectic accounts of the strange experience of the uncanny, it is the German language that seems to offer

the most nuanced account. Citing the entries for both the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich* in Daniel Sanders's *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1860, 1, 729), Freud writes,

Heimlich, adj., ... I. [B]elonging to the house, not strange, familiar, tame, intimate, friendly, etc. ... (b) Of animals: tame, companionable to man. ... (c) Intimate, friendly comfortable; the enjoyment of quiet content, etc., arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house. Is it still heimlich to you in your country where strangers are felling your woods? 'She did not feel too heimlich with him.' ... II. Concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others. To do something heimlich, i.e., behind someone's back; to steal away heimlich; heimlich meetings and appointments. ... 'The heimlich art' (magic). 'Where public ventilation has to stop, there heimlich conspirators and the loud battle-cry of professed revolutionaries.' 'A holy, heimlich effect.' ... 'learned in strange Heimlichkeiten' (magic arts). ... Note especially the negative 'un-': eerie, weird, arousing gruesome fear: 'Seeming quite unheimlich and ghostly to him.' 'The unheimlich, fearful hours of night.' 'I had already long since felt an unheimlich,' even gruesome feeling.' 'Now I am beginning to have an unheimlich feeling.' ... 'Feels an unheimlich horror.' 'Unheimlich and motionless like a stone image.' 'The unheimlich mist called hill-fog.' 'These pale youths are unheimlich and are brewing heaven knows what mischief.' 'Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light' (Schelling).— 'To veil the divine, to surround it with a certain Unheimlichkeit.' ...

As these entries indicate, the experience of the uncanny emerges in relation to the home. On one hand, heimlich or the homely refers to the capacity to sustain an intimate and cozy domestic life (belonging to the home); here space is rendered meaningful through a bourgeoisie ideology, which emphasizes the "privacy" and "security" of the home's interior. This is the tamed home, a home that sharply differs from some "wild" outside. On the other hand, unheimlich represents the negation of heimlich, a rejection of the home that also conjures up a range of connotations. For example, if the home is about the tame, the uncanny is about the untamed; if the uncanny is about familiarity, the uncanny conjures up an unfamiliar world; and if heimlich is a secure space of private interiority, the unheimlich is a strange and eerie world where nothing is secret and safe.

Interestingly, though Freud begins his treatment of Jentsch's initial definition of the uncanny by evoking a wide range of connotations associated with the *unheimlich*, in the end Freud betrays this complexity by reducing the uncanny to a psychoanalytic framework. That is, though Freud begins by situating the uncanny as a polyvalent experience that is inherently uncertain and susceptible to ambivalence, he attempts nonetheless to "tame" this "semiotic wildness" through the rational application of psychoanalytic theory. As Anneleen Masschelein (2003) writes regarding the way in which the Freudian concept of the uncanny "problematizes the very act of conceptualization and theory formation:"

In order to determine the "essence" of the uncanny, Freud proposes a double investigation. First, he will proceed inductively by finding the common denominator of a great many cases of the uncanny. Then, he will confront these results with a semantic and etymological study of the meaning of the adjective. The question of reference becomes problematic on both accounts. According to Kofman and Cixous, Freud's complementary investigations are circular: the dictionary is called upon to corroborate the results of the case studies, but the one has no more reality than the other, because Freud merely confirms his interpretations by another interpretation. Not only is he thus trapped in the hermeneutic circle, he is also unable to distinguish between literal meaning and metaphorical meaning, between denotation and connotation, between reality and fiction.

As Masschelein continues, the conceptual problem of trying to get at the "essence" of the uncanny can be found in the way Freud reduces everything associated with the eerie world of the *unheimlich* to the "return of the repressed." That is, while Freud's inductive method unleashes a plethora of ideas, experiences and concepts, the true heart of the uncanny rests on the 'castration complex,' especially the subject's inability to keep at bay various unconscious thoughts, memories or desires. This is evidenced explicitly in Freud's interpretation of Hoffmann's story "The Sandman." Whereas one might contend that the creepiness of the story involves the protagonist's inability to determine the authenticity of a range of automata, for Freud everything in

the story points to the same threatening possibility, to the subject's unconscious fear of castration. "We shall venture," Freud writes, "therefore, to refer the uncanny effect of the Sand-Man to the anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood."

Thus, while Jentsch identifies the story's strangeness with 'intellectual uncertainty,' especially Nathaniel's inability to determine the veracity of the automata, Freud offers a more temporal reading of the play between familiarity and unfamiliarity: in short, the uncanny emerges in the story when something that should have remained repressed returns to haunt the subject. But, by associating the 'essence' of the uncanny with the return of the repressed, an experience that is dependent on the functioning of the unconscious, Freud only seems to make matter worse, as his desire to get at the uncanny leads to further ambivalence. As Masschelein writes:

When discussing the examples of the uncanny - already problematic in themselves because of their divergent, almost incompatible nature - Freud relates the idea of the familiar which has become strange to the psychoanalytic notion of repression. What is frightening is the return of the repressed. In his view, the prefix un- is none other than the mark of repression. With this prefix we are of course but one step removed from the quintessential Freudian concept, the unconscious, which is in a way an equally 'unthinkable' concept. The very notion of the unconscious excludes the idea of a consciously thinking, rational subject which is, as Samuel Weber points out, the basis of Western thought since Descartes and Kant. Likewise, how can we think the *unheimliche* as the negation of an ambivalent word like *heimlich*, if we cannot be sure of a stable referent in the first place?

Even near the end of the essay, Freud seems to point to the unsatisfactory nature of his own reduction. "It may be true that the uncanny [*unheimlich*] is something which is secretly familiar [*heimlich-heimisch*], which has undergone repression and then returned from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfills this condition. But the selection of material on this basis does not enable us to solve the problem of the uncanny. For our proposition is clearly not convertible. Not everything that fulfills this condition — not everything that recalls repressed desires and

surmounted modes of thinking belonging to the prehistory of the individual and of the race — is on that account uncanny.”

With the rise of structural and post-structural thought, a range of thinkers - from Cixous to Derrida - have returned to Freud’s essay, offering a range of critical discourses on the “impossibility” of mapping the essence of the concept of the uncanny.³ It is not my intention to discuss this criticism here; rather what is important for my conception of the (un)homely⁴ is the way Freud understands the uncanny as a process of destabilization, where the familiarity of the home can be dismantled from within. Subsequently, if the home is often portrayed as the mythical site of insularity, a private oasis that can protect the dweller from the harshness of the outside world, here Freud shows that no home is free from a potential destabilization. However, while the “return of the repressed” provides a starting point for a theorization of the (un)homely, this definition will not prove satisfactory. Instead, in the next few sections I will navigate through a range of recent theories that allow us to broaden our conception of the (un)homely to include a wide range of external and internal intrusions.

Contemporary Theory and the Return of the Uncanny

While Freud’s essay was written in the context of early modern society and the horrors witnessed during the first Great War, the concept of the uncanny continues to resonate with various aspects of contemporary societies. Indeed, commenting on the

³ See Schneider’s *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare*, Cixous’ “Fiction and its Phantoms: A Reading of Freud's 'Das Unheimliche,’” Gilman’s, *Reading Freud's Reading*, Hertz’s “Freud and the Sandman” and Derrida’s *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*

⁴ It is important to remind the reader that at times the uncanny and the (un)homely appear as interchangeable concepts. For the most part I will use the latter, since I aim to show how the uncanny can be detached from a psychoanalytic framework.

way that the uncanny was a much discussed concept in the 1990s, Martin Jay writes that the term has emerged as a master trope that can be extended to a wide range of critical discourses. Reflecting on his own personal experience with the doubling and repetitive nature of the uncanny (Jay was surprised that the proposed title of his essay on the uncanny had already been taken by a New York Times reviewer):

... I then came to realize that there was something strangely fitting in the fact that what I thought was an original idea was actually anticipated by someone else. For it is precisely the issue of the uncertain status of originality and the haunting of what is new in the present by the residues of the past that is my theme. The term that best captures that feeling is, of course, the “uncanny” (or in German, *das Unheimlich*), which has become one of the most supercharged words in our current critical vocabulary. What, I want to ask, are the implications of its present power? Why now in the 1990s has the uncanny become a master trope available for appropriation in a wide variety of contexts? What are the possible draw-backs of granting it so much explanatory force? (1998:157).

In his article “Freud's ‘The Uncanny’ and Deconstructive Criticism: Intellectual Uncertainty and Delicacy of Perception,” Morten Bartnæs also comments on the immense popularity of the Freudian uncanny, especially its dominant use within cultural studies, where Freud's 1919 essay has gained as much exposure as Freud's seminal work *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Thus, while Freud's essay remained a marginal part of his oeuvre during the early part of the 20th century, forming a kind of repressed discourse within the wider history of psychoanalysis, the essay's revival forms a self-referential testament to the non-closure of the uncanny, its ability to return, as the first part of the 21st century awakens to a discursive haunting:

Today, the article has definitively emerged from the marginal position it had during the first 50 years of its existence. In the Humanities departments of Western universities, “The ‘Uncanny’” can be referred to with nearly the same implicit demand for immediate recognition as *The Interpretation of Dreams*; in literary and cultural studies, the notion of the ‘Uncanny’ experiences a degree of popularity which can be compared to the one enjoyed by traditional, psychoanalytical concepts a few decades ago. Indicative of this popularity is not only the number of hits produced by searching for the term in humanities databases like the Modern Language Association's Bibliography, but also the

inclusion of the concept as a headword in recent dictionaries of aesthetics, cultural studies and literary criticism. Book-length studies dealing with the subject include Nicholas Royle's (2003) successful 340-page 'introduction', and a volume by Anneleen Masschelein (2010, forthcoming), especially dedicated to the conceptualization process which has formed (and forms) today's ways of using the term (2010:29).

Using this new body of literature on the uncanny, what I wish to do in the remaining part of this chapter is develop a conception of the (un)homely through a range of broad strokes. That is, rather than search for the "essence" of the (un)homely, as Freud attempts, my reading of the (un)homely will bring together a wide range of discourses that can be applied to various aspects of contemporary societies. As such, my task will be to open up the concept to a range of discourses – architectural, technological, sociological – that can help in an analysis of those contemporary films that situate the home as a prime trope for exploring various themes on the problems of "dwelling."

By attempting to broaden the concept of the (un)homely and veer it away from exclusive questions of the subject's uncertain psychological disposition or the threatening process of the return of repression, I align myself with Nicholas Royle's recent work on the uncanny. In the opening of his book *The Uncanny: An Introduction*, Royle acknowledges the vital importance of Freud's seminal essay, especially the way the uncanny offers aesthetic and psychological insight into those ghoulish and haunting aspects of the experience of modern reality. The uncanny, in short, is an aesthetic barometer for gauging the subject's uncertain position in the modern world. Yet, while the uncanny is an important aesthetic and psychological concept, it requires some reworking if it is to be useful in mapping the precarious nature of contemporary societies. As Royle writes,

The uncanny, then, is not merely an 'aesthetic' or 'psychological matter (whatever that might mean): its critical elaboration is necessarily bound up with analyzing, questioning and even transforming what is called 'everyday'. This applies not only in relation to issues of sexuality, class, race, age, imperialism and colonialism - so many issues of potentially uncanny 'otherness' already evident in the nineteenth century - but also, for example, in relation to notions of automation, technology and programming. There seems to be a general acknowledgement that our lives, our experiences, the coming and goings within and all around us are increasingly programmed. Such is in part the very meaning of 'globalization'. As Christopher Johnson has described it in an essay on the uncanny and technology: 'we are animated and agitated by a power or program that seems to violate our most intuitive sense of self-determination' (2003:23).

Indeed, as I will show, in many contemporary films the homely spaces of domesticity can at times be susceptible to an attack from the everyday world of technological automation, as the most banal kinds of technologies, like cellphones, can cause the dweller to be uncertain about their social and contextual relationship to others. Thus, while Freud's uncanny points inward towards the subject's psyche, Royle's reconceptualization points to the way the uncanny is also intimately linked to the everyday world of external technologies. However, this question of the relationship between the (un)homely and the technological need not be framed only in terms of contemporary times. In her book *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, Terry Castle examines how the larger social environment, and, more specifically, the imbrications of everyday space in the rise of new "ordering" technologies, relates to the uncanny.

The most significant facet of Castle's work, I believe, involves the way she forcefully aligns Freud's essay with its larger social, political and cultural environments. That is, while it may not have been Freud's aim to create a map of the modern world through his evocation of the bizarre spaces of the 'return of the repressed,' and while one does one readily think of the essay in terms of its historicity, the significance of the term cannot be taken out of its historical context. As Castle argues with respect to

the way in which Freud's exploration of infantile drives must be seen in terms of the development of modern enlightenment and rationality,

[t]his will seem an ambitious claim perhaps, but it is one that I think a careful reading of Freud's essay makes inevitable. True, we don't usually regard "The 'Uncanny'" as a historical allegory, let alone as a historical allegory having to do with the eighteenth century. Freud was hardly an intellectual historian in the conventional sense and often appeared impervious to matters of historical specificity. The diachronism structuring "The 'Uncanny'" might seem, on the face of it, of the loosest and vaguest sort—merely a version of the familiar psychoanalytic distinction between the archaic and the contemporary...(1995:9).

But as Castles' book makes clear, the uncanny is far from "merely a version of the familiar psychoanalytic distinction between the archaic and the contemporary." It is not as if the Freudian uncanny could be read outside of its historical moment; for, as Castle convincingly argues, the uncanny that is at the heart of Hoffman's stories could not have been possible in any other time period. Only an 18th century world that was set ablaze with reason and rationality, with the instrumentation of new "ordering" technologies, could have led to the time period's deep fascination with the strange, morbid and weird. This can be evidenced in the way Hoffman draws on various new technological inventions, especially various forms of automata, to leave both the reader and the characters in a precarious state of unknowing. In the case of the automata, for example, the ambivalence of these technologies - are these sophisticated machines real or fake? - was no doubt a crucial part of the creepiness of Hoffman's stories. Thus, while Freud insists that the uncanny is not due to the "intellectually uncertainty" of these contraptions, Castle's broader historical shows how the uncanny must be read in terms of the way specific technologies may incite fear and anxiety.

In my analysis special attention will be directed to the technological aspects of the (un)homely. As Royles indicates, the uncanny is not just a personal or psychological phenomenon, but the (un)homely emerges as various technological

programs that are instilled in everyday environments. Already, the science fiction and horror genres have gone far in showing how modern forms of high technology contain various imminent threats, from the fear of viral technologies to the anxiety associated with the ominous figure of Big Brother. My analysis will differ somewhat from these technological explorations of the contemporary uncanny. Instead of looking to these more traditional eerie genres, I will look elsewhere – to the romantic comedy, the family melodrama, to the art film – for those moments in which the everyday world of technologies comes to threaten the home from within.

Architecture and The Physical Manifestation of the (Un)Homely

One of the best starting points for investigating recent theorizations of the uncanny is Anthony Vidler's book *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. Noting how the idea of the uncanny has been seamlessly applied to a range of cultural practices, especially within the visual arts and cultural studies, Vidler successfully demonstrates how modern and postmodern architecture can also be successfully analyzed through the notion of the Freudian uncanny. But while Vidler's work evocatively aligns the Freudian uncanny with modern architecture to show how modern and postmodern societies are often unhomely and inhospitable spaces, for Vidler, architecture has not been the natural site for explorations of the weird and strange. Rarely, for example, do architects try and attempt to create or evoke strange and inexplicable spaces.

In many ways, this neglect of the uncanny within architecture is surprising. As a term that conjures up domestic spaces, especially the way the home is haunted from within, the uncanny seems to be first and foremost an architectural and spatial

phenomena. Commenting on the way the Freudian uncanny centers on domestic space, Vidler writes,

Despite Freud's reluctance to accept the limits of this explanation- Jentsch's definition was, he concluded, "incomplete"-it nonetheless underlined a first relation of the uncanny to the spatial and environmental, that of "orientation," of "knowing one's way about." For Freud's purposes, the multiple significations and affiliations of the German word *unheimlich* were more promising. They served at once to clarify the operations of the uncanny as a systematic principle as well as to situate its domain firmly in the domestic and the homely, thence to permit its decipherment in individual experience as the unconscious product of a family romance (1992:23).

However, while the Freudian uncanny makes its home in the domestic environment, according to Vidler, there has been no real engagement between the field of modern architecture and Freud's essay. It is not that there is a shortage of studies analyzing the way architectural spaces function as (un)homely and haunting environments; it is that these studies mostly deal with imaginary buildings or spaces, rather than examine actual architectural forms. Indeed, as Vidler points out, long before Freud's essay, various 18th century authors, such as Edgar Allen Poe, had already depicted the home as a dreadful and sinister space that could evoke an encounter with the sublime. Describing one of Poe's sublime homes, Vidler writes:

But in Poe's 'paradigmatic haunted house, all the tell-tale signs of haunting were present, systematically culled from his romantic predecessors. The site was desolate; the walls were blank and almost literally "faceless," its windows "eye-like" but without life, "vacant." It was, besides, a repository of centuries of memory and tradition, embodied in its walls and objects; the walls were marked by the "discoloration of ages" and crumbling stones; the furnishings were dark, the rooms vaulted and gloomy; it was, in fact, already a museum, a collection such as that assembled by Alexandre du Somme-rard in the Hotel de Cluny, here preserved in memory of a family. Finally, the family itself was almost extinct, doomed by a history that lent the air of the tomb, the family vault, to this once-living abode; its fabric was reminiscent of "old wood-work which has rotted for some years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air" (1992:18).

There are two central points about Vidler's account of the architectural uncanny that I wish to develop here. The first concerns the way Vidler's account of the uncanny in the romantic tradition shows how the home is susceptible to a potential attack from the outside. That is, unlike Freud's account, where the uncanny attacks from within the home, in many of the stories of Poe, the home, especially when viewed from the perspective of bourgeoisie ideology, was treated as the only viable way of warding off an *external intrusion* (1992: 3, 4). Subsequently, while the Freudian uncanny centers around the dreadful qualities of interior space, wherein the inside provides no protection from a potential intrusion, the (un)homely for Vidler can nonetheless be situated on the outside, as various unwanted social groups or institutions, come to represent those "feared others" that must be exiled or discarded. For example, in Poe's time, Vidler contends, the (un)homely figured as an important sign of the anxiety the middle classes had over the new working classes.

The second important aspect of Vidler's conception of the (un)homely involves the way he focuses on the uncanny life of the city. While for Freud the *unheimlich* is undoubtedly domestic – a threat that emerges from within the family romance – for many modern cultural and social critics perhaps the most sinister and menacing aspect of modern life was the city. Indeed, while the literary imaginary offers innumerable images of haunted or ghostly homes, walls that carry the fear and dread of the outside, the uncanny can be equally understood as a category for thinking about modernity as a failed urban project, about the precarious way in which one can be "at home" in the city (1992:12).

Commenting on how the postmodern city's endless array of wasted and derelict spaces can be traced back to an entire urban modernist tradition starting in the late 18th century, Vidler writes:

The contemporary sensibility that sees the uncanny erupt in empty parking lots around abandoned or rundown shopping malls, in the screened trompe l'oeil of simulated space, in, that is, the wasted margins and surface appearances of postindustrial culture, this sensibility has its roots and draws its commonplaces from a long but essentially modern tradition. Its apparently benign and utterly ordinary loci, its domestic and slightly tawdry settings, its ready exploitation as the frisson of an already jaded public, all mark it out clearly as the heir to a feeling of unease first identified in the late eighteenth century (1992: 3).

Like Castle, who reads Freud's essay within the larger historical climate of 18th century Europe, Vidler's account of the unhomely nature of modern architecture and urban cultures demonstrates the more extensive ways in which the uncanny emerges to haunt the modern and postmodern experience. The home is not merely susceptible to an attack from within; the decline of the family is not simply a private, psychological experience. Rather, the unhomely appears in the form of various *external* intrusions – from the uncertainty and vulnerability of the city crowd and urban stranger to the injustice of the urban homelessness.

To illustrate the distinctly urban nature of the uncanny Vidler looks to the works of Simmel and Benjamin, who immediately saw in the rise of the great modern cities a new force of destabilization, as one's static perspective was undermined by new modes of hyper mobility. Faced with the new heterogeneous city crowds, forced to intermingle in a urban world that was always on the move, in a constant state of flux and mobility, the urbanite was faced with this new dilemma: how to observe the crowd, to watch and even be tantalized by its incessant flow without being swept up in it; how to participate in the city without succumbing to its absolute chaos, its all-out

engulfing motion. The larger question was that of how to be of the crowd yet simultaneously retain one's individuality.

The dilemma then for the new modern urbanite was to reclaim some semblance of home – an oasis of security in a sea of urban strangers – while simultaneously embracing the excitement and pleasure that came with constantly witnessing a world of novelty. Such a dilemma and its solution were worked out by Benjamin through his notion of the flaneur. As a city walker, who attempted to navigate the city's labyrinthine structure while simultaneously remaining a distanced observer, the flaneur embodied the new urban tensions between remaining both proximate and distanced from the city's new sites of mobility. Thus, whereas Freud sees the uncanny as an internal, domestic disturbance, Vidler here shows how the uncanny can attack from without, as the unhomely erupts as a public experience integral to the life of the city.

Hybridity and the (Un)homely

As we have seen so far, the experience of the (un)homely has to do with the difficulty of maintaining boundaries, as various internal and external threats dismantle the line between inside and outside. But, as Royle argues, the uncanny does not simply disrupt the border between inside and outside in any straightforward way. It is not as if one were able to know precisely where a threat came from - as if one were always securely located inside or outside some unwanted intrusion. Rather the uncanny problematizes the ability to even know or determine the distinction between an external or internal disruption. As Royle writes, "The uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter: it is perhaps inseparable from an apprehension, however fleeting, of something that should have remained secret and hidden but has come to

light. But it is not 'out there', in any simple sense: as a crisis of the proper and natural, it disturbs any straightforward sense of what is inside and what is outside. The uncanny has to do with a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality” (2003:2).

Bordering what is inside and outside, standing in-between what is known and unknown, the (un)homely questions the very ability to determine proper demarcations; in short, the (un)homely is a hybrid experience, a feeling of never being able to find a proper and pure sense of identity or location. According to Homi Bhabha, this state of hybridity even requires an additional mode of space, a third space, which seriously questions the binary constitution of self/other, public/private and inside/outside. In the uncanny world of the third space, to be hybrid does not mean to simply co-join two separable and distinction entities. Hybridity is not the convergence of two lines of movement; rather hybrid experiences problematize the idea that there were ever two poles to begin with. As Bhabha writes, “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge...The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (The Third Space: 211).

According to David Huddart, Bhabha’s notion of a third space represents a direct challenge to a dialectical process that would envision hybrid identities as the result of the merger of thesis and anti-thesis (2006: 122). Hybridity is not the result of a synthesis of two predetermined and purified poles. As Bhabha writes in terms of the process of diaspora, the problem with much colonial and post-colonial discourse rests on the way colonization is defined in terms of the coming together of two pure

cultures: there are, so we are led to believe, the colonial cultures of power and there are the colonized cultures of subjugation.

But, for Bhabha, in reality the process of colonization is not so straightforward. There is no static and pure national culture that can be opposed to another. Indeed, as Nico Israel argues, Bhabha's examination of nationhood or the forging of the national home is much more akin to the strange and ambivalent world of the Freudian uncanny than it is to the imagined community of Benedict Anderson. In brief, the national home is never a real or imagined community that can be neatly distinguished from other real or imagined communities. The house of the nation is always hybrid, always a complicated, disjointed and jarring experience in which other time periods and spaces cross each other. As Israel writes in reference to Bhabha's work "DissemiNation:"

In "DissemiNation," his subtle investigation of nationhood (and barbed critique of Benedict Anderson's thesis on national identity formation, ...Bhabha argues for a reconsideration of what he calls (with a nod to Mikhail Bakhtin) "the chronotope of national identity' in the global political realm. "We need," Bhabha declares, "another time of writing that will be able to inscribe the ambivalent and chiasmic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic 'modern' experience of the Western nation (2000:8)

In order to explicate "this other time of writing" Bhabha relies heavily on Freud's theory of the uncanny. Confronted with a postcolonial reality in which many marginal and peripheral people have had to cope with being labeled "foreigners," "outsiders," "strangers" and other derogatory terms, the unnerving process of the return of the repressed provides a poignant concept for theorizing the significance of a global geopolitical reality ripe with various modes of social and spatial dislocation. Here, the return of the repressed, the return of that which should have remained

hidden, provides a succinct metaphor for the way the marginalized “Other” returns to haunt the whole project of modernity.

In “The World and Home,” Bhabha explores the uncanny geopolitical realities of forced migration by looking to the literary world – especially the novels of Toni Morrison – in order to uncover those “intimate recesses of the domestic space” that “become sites for history's most intricate invasions” (141). Beginning the essay with an account of the “threatening home” in Henry James, he writes,

In the House of Fiction you can hear, today, the deep stirring of the "unhomely." You must permit me this awkward word - the unhomely - because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world in an unhallowed place. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and the public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself with Henry James's Isabel Archer "taking the measure of your dwelling" in a state of "incredulous terror." And it is at this point that the world first shrinks for Isabel and then expands enormously” (1992:141).

For Bhabha, in much postcolonial literature the home becomes a site for a range of painful displacements, (un)homely spaces where the line between the home and the world becomes blurred and one’s sense of orientation is confused. For if the home represents an idealistic space that marks one’s belonging in the world (I belong because I have a home to settle in), or is a space where one’s safety emerges from being free of the world (I am secure because my home keeps the world at bay) for many people who must endure a reality of forced migration and forced accommodation, the home can be a painful reminder of the inability to escape what Bhabha calls the “world-in-the-home.” As Bhabha writes:

In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the

world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the home, the home-in-the-world (1992:141).

But while some may have to endure a world where the home is never a sign of belonging or a sign of making a world on one's own terms, this does not mean that the (un)homely is indistinguishable from homelessness. Nor does it mean that the (un)homely is a negative sign, a pejorative term that indicates one's abject position. "What does it mean to be at home in the world? Home may not be where the heart is, nor even the hearth. Home may be a place of estrangement that becomes the necessary space of engagement; it may represent a desire for accommodation marked by an attitude of deep ambivalence toward one's location. Home may be a mode of living made into a metaphor of survival (1992:142).

Indeed, while the uncanny is often treated as a dreadful experience, an abject other that must be tamed, for Bhabha the return of the marginalized can be viewed as a positive experience. Through his conception of the uncanny, Bhabha's point is to provide critical tools for giving these repressed figures a new voice, one in which the simple dualistic scheme of colonized and colonized breaks down. In its place, the uncanny emerges as a hybrid term that situates the dweller in an in-between space, a space that in being 'beyond' allows for an intervention in the present:

Being in the 'beyond', then is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to re-describe our cultural contemporaneity, to re-describe our human, historical commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond' becomes a space of intervention in the here and now (1994:7).

For Rapport and Overing this space of "the beyond" is deeply political, as it suggests a way for marginalized people to take charge of their (un)homely territories and remake them according to their own desires:

By demonstrating to the powerless the unhomely territory which is singularly their own, his aim is to suggest a way through which they could begin the process of self-empowerment. He calls for the development of a 'literature of recognition', through which these peoples could find the means to signify, negate and initiate their own historic desire. By discovering their own voices, their writings could have revisionary force toward the end of destabilizing traditional relations of cultural domination. Those who have been categorized by Western civilization as beyond the pale and thus its oppositional other, could do the job themselves of translating who they are, while at the same time expressing their nausea with the linear, progressivist, rationalist claims of establishment thought. There is much at stake with this new cultural discourse that is being called for from the margins of the world (2000:364).

Obviously Bhabha's conception of the (un)homely provides many tools for engaging with films that focus on the global diaspora. *40 Quadratmeter Deutschland*, *300 Miles to Heaven*, *A Fine Day*, *A Way of Life* and *A Little Bit of Freedom*, for example, are just some of the many recent European films that attest to the way issues of global migrancy and forced exile belong to the cinematic imaginary. In my analysis I will not be dealing with the specific issues of the global diaspora. Instead, my reading of contemporary films will utilize Bhabha's theorization of the (un)homely in a much more broad sense. Specifically, my main interest in Bhabha's work involves the way his notion of hybridity questions the demarcation of boundaries, especially the ways in which the spaces of the home cannot be separated from the world at large. Furthermore, while Bhabha's ideas on forced migration are situated within postcolonial discourses, his acknowledgement of the way in which the process of having to accommodate to someone else's sense of home may lead to both estrangement and engagement, I believe, offers powerful tools for accessing the way a range of forces and institutions (post-Fordism, new communication technologies) in contemporary western societies cast the home into a state of painful dislocation.

In their book *Home*, Dowling and Blunt provide perhaps one of the most extensive studies of the relationship between the home and the (un)homely. Borrowing from the fields of cultural studies, feminism, urban geography and postcolonial studies, their geographic approach to the home and the (un)homely rests on navigating a wide range of concepts and discourses in order to present the home as a vital term in understanding the scale, mobility and identity of contemporary societies. But though their work sets out to provide the reader with a rich overview of the many ways the figure of the home appears in contemporary social and cultural theory, their work nonetheless rests on a central aim:

Throughout the book, we carefully dismantle the dichotomy between homely and unhomely homes. We do so by exploring the ways in which apparently homely places might be unhomely and places that are assumed to be unhomely are rendered homely. To do so we draw on Sigmund Freud's influential work on the uncanny. For Freud, the term 'heimlich' refers to familiarity and homeliness, whereas 'unheimlich' refers to unfamiliarity and unhomeliness. But, rather than exist in opposition to each other, 'one seems always to inhabit the other' (Gelder and Jacobs 1998:23; also see Vidler, 1994). As Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs explain, 'An "uncanny" experience may occur when one's home is rendered, somehow and in some sense, unfamiliar; one has the experience, in other words, of being in place and "out of place" simultaneously' (23). Just as the homely can be rendered unhomely, unhomely places may become homely, as we show in our discussion of sites like suburban homes and homeless shelters (2006:26).

Again, one of the key facets of the (un)homely involves its inherent ambivalence. One person's peaceful and secure home may be any person's prison; a home that begins as a refuge may quickly be transformed into an urban nightmare. Indeed, depending on the perspective one takes on the home - whether one is talking about the different ways men and women experience the home or the way the (un)homely is a common postcolonial experience - what seems undeniable are the multiple ways in which these two terms shift, redouble, and twist and turn, such

that neither pole remains fixed or stable. In the following sections I will dwell on several of the main ways in which Dowling and Blunt broaden the concept of the (un)homely. These include: the actual and imaginary spaces of the home, the scale of the home, and the home's motility.

Actual and Virtual Homes:

The (un)homely experience is undoubtedly architectural and spatial. Despite the role physical forms play in the relationship between the home and the (un)homely, Dowling and Blunt insist that the materiality of the house is never enough for the creation of a home. That is, while the physical infrastructure of a house may assist in the making or unmaking of the home, the house on its own can never account for all the imaginary and emotional attachments that are conjured up by the idea of dwelling in a home:

Home, as we will show throughout the book, is a *place*, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is also an idea and an imaginary that is imbued with feelings. These may be feelings of belonging, desire and intimacy (as, for instance, in the phrase 'feeling at home'), but can also be feelings of fear, violence and alienation (Blunt and Varley 2004:3). These feelings, ideas and imaginaries are intrinsically spatial. Home is thus a *spatial imaginary*: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places (2006:2)

As a kind of spatial imaginary, homes rests on a merger between the actual and the virtual, as the home emerges from a range of feelings, associations and connections that are tied to a range of actual or imagined spaces. But despite this intimate connection of house and home it is necessary to separate both terms; one may, after all, be without a house but still feel connected and endeared to a sense of the home. "Given that a house may not be a home," Dowling and Blunt write, "and that home is not only experienced in a house, in this book we explicitly explore home

within and beyond the house. As spatialized feelings of belonging *and* alienation, desire *and* fear, the spatialities of home are broader and more complex than just housing. To understand these complex spatialities we need to move theoretically beyond housing studies to different geographical traditions” (2006:10).

To situate their understanding of the home as an actual and imaginary place, Dowling and Blunt make reference to the works of Heidegger and Iris Marion Young. In his essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” for example, Heidegger invites the reader to think about the relationship between building and dwelling. As he writes in the opening of the essay: “What is it to dwell?” And “How does building belong to dwelling?” For Heidegger the conventional wisdom that sees dwelling as a direct result of building is deeply misguided, since not all buildings are dwelling spaces and not all dwelling spaces require buildings:

We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal. Still, not every building is a dwelling. Bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations are buildings but not dwellings; railway stations and highways, dams and market halls are built, but they are not dwelling places. Even so, these buildings are in the domain of our dwelling. That domain extends over these buildings and yet is not limited to the dwelling place. The truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have his shelter there; the working woman is at home in the spinning mill, but does not have her dwelling place there; the chief engineer is at home in the power station, but he does not dwell there. These buildings house man. He inhabits them and yet does not dwell in them, when to dwell means merely that we take shelter in them.

For Heidegger “dwelling is *the basic character* of Being in keeping with which mortals exist.” As such, for Heidegger, the ability to find a home in the world cannot be simply answered through more building. The answer to our (un)homely, precarious age is not found in a surplus of actual houses. Rather we must learn how to dwell in the world first before we take recourse to constructing the infrastructure of dwelling:

However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older

also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling.

Whereas Heidegger provides an abstract philosophical analysis of how dwelling relates to building, in her essay “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme” Iris Marion Young focuses on the personal, localized meaning of the home and the (un)homely. Viewing the ability to make a home from the framework of feminist discourse, Young’s essay attempts to provide a positive spin on the way the home has been historically, for women, a space of alienation and injustice. While she acknowledges other feminist thinkers, who contend that the possession of the home for women always comes at a cost, as the home comes to serve the interest of men, Young still feels that there is the need to frame the home in a positive light. Indeed, through her essay, she outlines a set of basic criteria that help identify proper and equitable modes of dwelling. As Dowling and Blunt write, for Young the creation of the homely rests on “four ‘normative values of home that should be thought of as minimally accessible to all people’ (161): safety; individuation, whereby each individual has place for the basic activities of life; privacy; and preservation”(2006:5).

Dowling and Blunt’s assessment of Heidegger’s and Young’s approaches to dwelling demonstrate how the home is a complex site that conjoins feelings of belonging, alienation, fear and promise with actual and imaginary places. In my analysis of the cinematic (un)homely I will draw upon this tangled web of associations – from the home’s ability to incite oppression and alienation to its supportive role in enabling new individual and communal connections. In chapter 3, for instance, a

potential disruption to an old derelict building will be shown to assist in the development of an inner city community. Here the home becomes a site for the imaginary construction of the community's history. However, in chapter 6, the home is presented as a domestic trap that reflects the ways in which modern work conditions can damage one's ability to lead a fulfilling home life, where one's individuality is not compromised. Thus, while the (un)homely may appear, at first glance, to represent a ghastly and dreadful experience, for some a disruption to home can be quite liberating, as previous feelings of restriction can be transformed into signs of optimism and hope.

The Scale of the (Un)Homely

In many of the films I analyses special attention will be placed on particular domestic localities, as I look at how the materiality of the home provides clues, signs and themes for assessing changes in the nature of contemporary societies. As such, the local will be used to explore how the home is a porous site that opens itself up to a wide range of locations, connections and social relations. In short, I am interested in how the home and the (un)homely becomes what Dowling and Blunt call "multi-scalar." As they write: "A second spatiality of home is that home is multi-scalar. Much of the literature on home that we have reviewed in this chapter focuses only on the dwelling and/or household. In contrast, for us senses of belonging and alienation are constructed across diverse scales ranging from the body and the household to the city, nation and globe" (2006:27).

As mentioned previously, Massey has noted the strong tendency amongst certain critics to understand home as static site that is geographically embedded in specific locations. This is the static home that James Donald uncovers in the cultural

theory of Raymond Williams. For Donald, while many strands of cultural studies emphasis hybridity, difference and fragmentation, in many of Williams' works there is a firm investment in a nostalgic return to outdated notions of community and social bonding, where one's authentic sense of identity stems from one's shared geographic location. Indeed, according to Donald, Williams even narrows down the place where one attains an organic sense of community and identity to one's place of birth. As Williams recounts nostalgically about the Black Mountains:

The only landscape I ever see, in my dreams, is the Black Mountain villages in which I was born. When I go back to that country, I feel a recovery of a particular way of life, which appears, at times, as an inescapable identity, a more positive connection that I have known elsewhere. Many other men feel this, of their own native places, and the strength of the idea of settlement, old and new, is then positive and unquestioned" (Donald: 147).

Here, Williams not only sees the positive feelings of reconnecting to a particular way of life in terms of the past, but suggests that identity must be forged through a particular relationship with space. In short, home is reduced to a site of origins. In contrast to this contained sense of home, Dowling and Blunt argue for a more dispersed and open conception of home. Reviewing Sallie Marston's geographic theories of scale, Dowling and Blunt contend that, just as the home is a complex site that entails multiple configurations, the scale of the home must be viewed in terms of its wide and open connections to other social relationships, times and places. "For Marston, like other theorists of scale, geographical scale is socially produced, or made. Scale is 'not a preordained hierarchical nomenclature for ordering the world', but 'made by and through social processes' (2004:172). Scales – like home, city, nation and empire – are, according to Marston, neither pre-determined nor mutually exclusive. Instead, a scale is constructed through *inter-relations* with other scales" (2006:27)

Since the home and the (un)homely are defined through their “inter-relations” with other scales, the significance of the domestic sphere cannot be read in isolation. On the contrary, the spaces of the home are dispersed across multiple sites. “Home places,” Dowling and Blunt write, “can be a suburb, neighborhood, nation, or indeed the world....Feelings of belonging and relations with others could be connected to a neighborhood, a nation, stretched across transnational space, or located on a park bench” (2006:28). A dominant way this “scalar relationship” can be evidenced is the way thinking about the home has been historically linked to thinking about the nation. In *Home Territories*, David Morley looks at how the materiality of the home has often been used as a way to conceive and disseminate messages about the nation. For example, during the 1950’s the idea of the American nation was often portrayed through images of the ideal middle class suburban home, whereby privacy, technology and insularity provided emblems for the might of American capitalism (see chapter 2).

However, while the home has been important to demarcating the nation’s borders, in contemporary times the home also forms a poignant sign of the permeability of the home-land, as many new technologies, migratory patterns and transnational cultures, emphasize the way spatial borders are constantly traversed. This dispersed sense of home has already been seen in the work of Homi Bhabha, where the home is for many a transnational experience, a migratory home where the dweller continues to maintain connections with many transnational sites. As Dowling and Blunt write in reference to work of Avtar Brah: “Research on home and transnational migration raises important questions that destabilize a sense of home as a stable origin and unsettle the fixity and singularity of a place called home. Moreover, such questions also suggest that ideas of home are relational across space and time, are

often shaped by memories of past homes as well as dreams of future homes, and bring together both material and imaginative geographies of residence and belonging, departure and return. Transnational homes are thus shaped by ideas and experiences of location and dislocation, place and displacement, as people migrate for a variety of reasons and feel both at home and not at home in a wide range of circumstances” (2006:198).

A second way in which the home is dispersed across a range of scales involves the “absent presence” afforded through many communications devices (see chapters 5 and 6). With mobile device, like cellphones, the internet and other software programs that enable people to communicate at a distance, social connections to the home no longer depend on the fixity of a geographic location, like the domestic sphere. The home rather is dispersed through various media networks. Commenting on the recent research into the way cyberspace has expanded the spaces of the home, Dowling and Blunt write, “This research shows that virtual geographies stretch the home far beyond the domestic sphere, as children physically located at home can chat online to other children around the world, and as transnational and diasporic connections are forged between different homes and homelands. The internet can foster new, transnational communities of identity and belonging – a virtual geography of home” (2006:207)

Thus, when considering the way home’s offer exclusionary or inclusionary spaces, it is vital to attend to the new virtual communities, networks and connections that are not based in any specific geographic location. In chapters 5 and 6, I will explore these issues of home networks through the figure of the mobile phone, especially the way mobile connections allow for a more dispersed sense of social connectivity.

The remaining facet of the (un)homely I will explore involves the issue of movement and migration. While there has been a tendency to downplay the role migration plays in contemporary societies (Massey, for example, contends that all the hoopla over our “excessively mobile” societies fails to grasp the fact that most people remains spatially bound to a specific location) I believe it is still important to map the (un)homely in terms of how the home’s multi-scalarity depends on various kinds of movements; indeed, one might even say that the reality of constant travel is a precondition for one’s experience with homelessness or that the (un)homely is synonymous with a world obsessed with migration and flight. According to Stephen Cairns, the concepts of migration and architecture has been so polarized in western thought that we often think of both terms as antithetical to each other, as if one could only ever be at home when one was at a state of rest. As Cairns writes regarding the relationship between architecture and migration:

What is it to bring these terms together in this way? The two terms activate opposite meanings, one being associated with the groundedness of buildings, the constitution of places, and the delimitation of territories, the other with uprootedness, mobility, and the transience of individuals and groups of people. Yet, so neat is the opposition between the terms, that in Western thought they were often brought together as counterparts within a more general binary relation. This binary relation privileged such principles as settlement, stability, and permanence over those of movement, flux, and fluidity. Migrancy, in its various enforced and voluntary forms was aligned with the suspect qualities of movement, and so came to be considered to be the unfortunate exception to a more general principle of settlement. Within this logic, the migrant was ascribed kinship with the nomad, the Scythian, the gypsy, the wild man, and other figures that haunted the imagination of the settled citizen (2003:1).

As Cairns writes, migration and speed is that which “haunts” the grounded spaces of settlement. However, while many critics attest to the need to go beyond this dualism, the valorization of groundedness and rootedness over speed and exile

continues on in much cultural theory. According to French theorists Paul Virilio and Marc Auge, for example, our age can be defined as one where new technologies play a profound role in creating nomadic cultures that are dislocated from local urban environments. Concerned with the ways in which the pace and speed of contemporary life alters our sense of inhabiting local places, both theorists, I believe, belong to that “elitist tradition” that Massey identifies as promoting a “settled” and “static” conception of home. In short, both offer perspectives that emphasize how global information technologies create various “non-places” that have been cut off from any local context. As such, the “groundedness of settled places,” become uprooted and dislocated, as they are now seen as mere nodal points or switchboards in the circulation of data across global horizons.

Focusing his entire oeuvre around the Greek word ‘dromology’ or the logic of speed, Virilio’s historical exploration of how societies are structured and reconfigured by new modes of transport has led him to claim that we are in the midst of entirely new regime of time: absolute ‘real time.’ While contemporary societies continue to make improvements in its transport technologies, for Virilio these developments merely represent relative changes, changes in degree, in comparison to the radical and absolute transformation brought about by information technologies. Since information now travels at the speed of light, the ultimate speed barrier, there are no further advances to be made to the speed of communication. This leads to a state of absolute “real time,” a point of no return where every part of the globe is contained within the same informatic time zone. This leads to the possibility of physical distances becoming irrelevant to the ways in which people converse and communicate, since, in a world governed by light speed, there is no difference between

communicating locally or globally. All communication instead is played out in the same global space of information technologies.

For Virilio a major drawback of real time is that, at the speed of light, the embedded nature of places disappears entirely. That is, by relying more and more on the interspaces of virtual technologies, geographic spaces no longer mean as much to the identity of locations. In place of physical space we now have cinematic spaces, virtual walls that lead to the de-territorialization of reality. As Virilio writes:

Ours are cinematic societies. They are not only societies of movement, but of the acceleration of that very movement. And hence, of the shortening of distances in terms of time, but, I would also add, of the relation to reality. It is thus simply impossible to ignore the theory of relativity....Why so? Because we live it. We live it through mobile phones, through 'live' programmes on TV, through the telecommunications media, through Virtual Reality (VR), through cyberspace, through video-conferencing, through supersonic air travel, and so on...We have become deterritorialized. Our embedding in our native soil, that element of *hic et nunc*, (here and now), 'in situ', that embedding belongs, now, in a certain way, to the past. It has been overtaken by the acceleration of history – by the acceleration of reality itself – by 'real time', and by the 'live', all of which are in a stage beyond the *hic et nunc*, 'in situ' condition. Caught as we are between this territory-based embedding, which is of a geographic, geophysical nature, or even of a geostrategic nature in the case of the military, and total deterritorialization, what remains in order to interpret our world? (Armitage,17)

Like Virilio's work, Marc Augé's anthropological research also centers on how new technologies relate to "our embedding in our native soil." In *Non-Places*:

Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, Augé defines contemporary societies in terms of a social condition predicated on three figures of excess: excessive time, whereby history is burdened with an overabundance of information; excessive space, which involves the way local places are connected to the globe through interconnected flows of information; and finally excessive individualism, wherein places are made meaningful through individuals rather than a shared sense of social community (1995: 30-36).

For Augé, the interrelation of all these figures of excess leads to a supermodern world that can be best described as the non-place. Offering a general definition of non-places, Augé writes that if a place can be defined as that which is relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which is not relational, historical, or concerned with identity is a non-place (Augé, 1995: 77,78). Like Virilio, what Augé's is getting at in this definition of the non-place is that within a culture of excessive speed - whether it be due to the instant access of telecommunications or the creation of vast superhighways - places no longer mean the same thing as they did in the past. In short, the "native soil" of a local place, the embedded traditions that belong to a community, its particular customs, monuments and collective meaning, are no longer sustained; instead the particularities of the local are replaced by homogenous spaces that spread easily and evenly across the globe. Stripped of local variance, we enter a phase of monocultures, context-free places that no longer depend on using local knowledge and variation to navigate the environment. Rather the non-place is a space open to all users, since it is dependent on technological codes that are near universal.

Undoubtedly, the speed and migratory patterns of contemporary global societies lead to new relationships to geographic space. However, I think we need to be careful in seeing this shift towards speed in terms of broad claims about the end of home or the end of local variance. Rather, we need to think about how the world of movement gives rise to new kinds of mobile homes. As Rapport and Overring write,

... the realization of a world of movement gives onto radically different ideas of home—and also of homelessness. A far more mobile notion comes to the fore, ideational and behavioural: home as something to accompany people whenever they decamp. For a world of travellers—labour migrants, exiles and refugees—home comes to be located in a routine set of practices, in a repetition of habitual social interactions, in styles of dress and address, in memories and myths, in stories

carried around in one's head, in the ritual of a regularly used personal name. People are more at home nowadays, in short, in 'words, jokes, opinions, gestures, actions, even the way one wears a hat' (2000:158).

For some critics and writers, the excessive speed and migration of contemporary times do not necessarily lead to the end of home. On the contrary, for many, exile and dispersal may be required to find one's way of home. "There is also the paradox," Rapport and Overring write, "that it is by way of transience and displacement that one achieves an ultimate sense of belonging....to be at home 'in one's own place' it is necessary to become alienated and estranged to some degree, mentally or spiritually. Exile is a resource inasmuch as it gives onto that vantage-point from which one is best able to come to know oneself, to know oneself best" (2000:161). In his same chapter on Raymond William's static home, James Donald, for example, traces this praise of hyper-mobility to the works of Salmon Rushdie and the novelist's "hymn to migration and dislocation" (149). Whereas, for Donald, Williams' nostalgic recount of his time in the Black Mountains signals an antiquated desire to see identity and home as contained to a specific geographic location, in the works of Rushdie the contemporary world's constant flux is openly valorized and celebrated. In short, since hybridity, dislocation and perpetual movement are dominant in contemporary societies we should give up on ideas of the home, and embrace the chaos of perpetual exile.

But is it necessary to think of the "chaos of spatial dislocation" by abandoning the prospect of thinking about home. Jane A. Jacobs certainly does not think so. In her essay "Too Many Houses for a Home: Narrating the House in the Chinese Diaspora" (2004), Jacobs examines the Chinese diaspora film, *Floating Life*, to show how thinking about mobility is difficult without simultaneously thinking about the architecture of the domestic sphere. Jacobs frames her analysis in terms of Agnes

Heller's (1995) article 'Where are we at home?' where she identifies two vastly different experiences of home: the first (spatial) experience of home rests on what Heller calls a 'geographically monogamous' (1995:2) relationship to home, where the dweller is confined to a limited spatial location and travels very little. To illustrate this monogamous experience of home Heller recounts a story about meeting an Italian man who couldn't tell her directions to a nearby town since he had never left his community.

In contrast to this form of dwelling, Heller describes a "temporal home-experience," (1995:7) a mode of dwelling in which the dweller is perpetually on the move: this is the kind of dweller who may have several homes in multiple sites, regularly visits hotels, and speaks several languages. Unlike the monogamous geographic experience, this dweller is geographically 'promiscuous' (1995:1). To illustrate, Heller describes a mobile professional she meets on a flight, who becomes stumped by the question of where she calls home. Since the woman spends most of her time travelling to and from various international destinations, the woman is troubled by the idea of pinpointing exactly where she feels most at home; in the end she declares her home is where her cat lives. As Jacobs writes, this answer "suggests a world in which house and home are radically uncoupled (2004:166).

For Jacobs, while Heller's notion of geographic promiscuousness is fitting for a contemporary world besieged by various modes of migration, her ideal "time-traveller" fails to understand the way mobility and architecture need to be thought of together. That is, while migration seriously undermines more monogamous ways of dwelling, this does not mean that the house and architecture are eschewed by hyper modes of motility. As she writes:

People on the move are not all the same and it is important to register here that much contemporary human mobility is not associated with the stratospheric lifestyle represented by Heller's transnational professional. For the refugee and the migrant, being housed is often an imperative, and coming to feel as if one belongs a yearned for future state. For many migrant groups home ownership is an obsession. In Australia, for example, high rates of home ownership have for some time been recognized as a defining feature of a range of post-war migrant groups, including recent arrivals from Hong Kong (Bourassa 1994; Pulvirenti 2000). Migration, in particular, involves a complex system of inhabitations that incorporate architectures as various as the ancestral home, the departure lounge, the vehicle of passage, the temporary shelter and the new house. As such, architecture is always being called upon to structure the spatiality of a mobile world (2004: 167).

For Jacobs, migration does not simply equal the (un)homely. The migrant, transnational traveller does not simply give up on the longing and need for physical abodes. Rather, what is required is a way to understand the home as a dispersed and disjunctive space of dwelling, where the home is articulated through a range of sites, memories, emotions and ideas. Furthermore, instead of the absence of the home becoming a sign of one's homelessness, the migrant home can actually provide the material signs for one's traversals, as the home can accumulate all the different stages and scales involved in the passage from site to site. As Jacobs writes, "[t]his is not the vernacular house, although it is a house that may well contain any number of 'shifted' vernacularisms. This is not the ancestral home, although it may be a home that comes to embody that idea in any number of ways and localities. This is the mobile home and regardless of what kind of house it is, it calls into being flexible architectures of inhabitation"(2004:168).

Thus, while it might be tempting to see the hyper motility of contemporary societies as the impossibility of finding home, or an imminent sign of the contemporary (un)homely, Jacobs analysis of the way flexible modes of architecture and ideas of the home are still congruent with motility invites us to see the (un)homely

anew. Indeed, an underlying theme that I believe is evidenced in all the film I analyze is the ways in which contemporary dwelling needs to be understood as a dispersed and disjointed phenomena that nonetheless calls for new kinds of making home. This may be seen in the way new mobile communications allow different family members to connect across a range of fragmented spaces or the way global trends in urban redevelopment affect local spaces and architecture. In short, the (un)homely word of migratory homes asks us to consider how forces from elsewhere connect and align with local places.

Conclusion

I began this theoretical overview with the idea of the Freudian uncanny. For Freud the uncanny represents an uncertain disruption to the home, as unwanted or repressed desires and feeling come back to haunt the dweller. However, while the uncanny can be conceptualized as a kind of internal threat, we can use Freud's general framework to outline a contemporary notion of the (un)homely, wherein experiences of inhospitality or homesickness involves both external and internal threats. Below is a rough outline of some of the ways I have defined the relationship between the homely and the (un)homely.

Table 1: A binary map of the homely and the (un)homely

Homely	Vs.	Unhomely
Private	Vs.	Public
Local	Vs.	Global
Safety	Vs.	Danger
Proximate	Vs.	Dispersed
Bounded	Vs.	Porous

Located	Vs.	Mobile
Nature	Vs.	Technology
Site belonging	Vs.	Site of alienation

Yet, while this dualistic scheme can be helpful in analyzing the domestic spheres of film, it is important to note that, as all of the theorists discussed earlier indicate, the (un)homely is very much a hybrid and ambivalent experience that resists such neat and tidy divisions. Indeed, as I will show, while at times the disruptive powers of the (un)homely may be an unbearable and alienating experience, in other instances the unsettling of the home can be seen as a sign of hope, the hope of a better future or more liberating social relationships. Finally, while I have outlined how the (un)homely relates to a range of social and cultural phenomena (technology, urban life, gender, global diaspora) not all of these matters will be addressed evenly. Rather, I plan to use the preceding theory as an open and broad critical tool box that will be called upon to address my chosen corpus of films.

Chapter 2

The Decline of the Family – Home and Nation in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Decalogue*

The Politics of Domestic Uncertainty

In the fourth episode of Krzysztof Kieslowski's Polish television series *The Decalogue* (1989) the relationship between a father and daughter undergoes a sudden and shocking transformation. Anka, a restless young woman who is already unsure of her identity and place within the family home, comes to learn that Michal is not her real, biological father. Deeply troubled by the loss of her mother, who died tragically during childbirth, Anka becomes extremely distraught, as the discovery creates a precarious rift in a home already plagued by fragility. Indeed, as doubts over her origins mount, Anka's domestic life is quickly transformed into a dangerous place of deception and insecurity, as the young woman is led down a path of moral uncertainty.

While the tension over who is Anka's real father creates a volatile family sphere, where parental authority is questioned and undermined, this is not the film's most scandalous moment. Rather, the most troubling moments occur a little later, when the pair momentarily transforms their familial relationship into a dangerous game of incestuous desire. Freed from the laws of the family, technically no longer "father and daughter," Anka and Michal see their uncertainty over their proper roles in the home perilously played out as a seductive game of erotic fantasy, as paternal bonds are replaced by the energy of forbidden desire. Michal, in the end, rejects his daughter's incestuous flirtations, restoring order to the family unit by reclaiming his

status as the Father-Figure. In the end, however, no matter how hard we try to imagine them in a “normal” relationship, what remains is an insurmountable feeling of doubt and uncertainty, as the solidity of the family bond - that most important bearer of social order - lays in fragile tatters.

While episode four is undoubtedly the most disturbing and risqué of all the episodes in *The Decalogue*, the theme of troubled homes is by no means exclusive to this episode. Rather, the entire series pivots around domestic woe and hardship, especially the way families are ruined by internal strife. Everywhere one looks, it seems, what is repeatedly encountered is the same image of the unraveled and vulnerable family home: children die tragic and unpredictable deaths (episode 1); marriages are threatened by infidelity (episodes 2, 3 and 9); brothers are torn apart by greed (episode 10); children are kidnapped by their own family members (episode 7); families engage in heinous crimes (episode 8). From start to finish, *The Decalogue* is a rich and moving statement about the decline of the family, as it weaves together melodramatic stories about homes in desperate need of mending, homes overpowered by desire, longing, crime, and pain.

In this chapter my principal concern will be to diagnosis the significance of the series’ explicit and complex exploration of the uncertain and fragile domestic home. However, rather than look at the series’ domestic woes in terms of the issues of family responsibility, spiritual neglect or moral defects (these are the traditional ways in which *The Decalogue* is often interpreted⁵) my interpretation looks at how problems in domesticity provide complex metaphors for larger geo-political concerns, especially

⁵ See, for example, Christopher Garbowski’s *Krzysztof Kieslowski’s Decalogue Series: The Problem of the Protagonists and their Self-Transcendence*, Lloyd Baugh’s *Imaging the divine: Jesus and Christ-figures in film* and Paul Coates’ *Cinema, religion, and the romantic legacy*.

the precarious state of the nation in an age of globalization. That is, in my reading Kieslowski's emotional and poetic exploration of the cinematic melodrama does not refer to either moralistic or metaphysical issues and themes; nor will I look at the series' profound examination of the "human condition" and the loss that comes from the decline of spirituality. Rather, the home will be explored in terms of how the personal becomes political, how the home becomes the vehicle for deciphering the state of the nation.

A political reading of *The Decalogue* can be found in the works of several critics, who have shown how the family's decline in the series represents Poland's uncertain political environment. According to Joseph Kickasola, for example, the trouble with identity in the "incest" episode is deeply political, as the uncertainty of the family bond, especially its inability to guarantee social order, signifies Poland's turbulent past, especially its difficulty in attaining an overarching sense of national identity (2004: 197.) Ruth Perlmutter goes even further, arguing that the *entire* series can be understood as a political meditation on the meaning of the waning of family responsibility. As Perlmutter writes, "Although with *The Decalogue*, Kieslowski ostensibly abandoned political issues for more universal moral concerns, in a Kieslowski film the personal cannot be severed from the political. The struggles of his characters with identity, career options and parental responsibilities emanate from Kieslowski's ambivalence towards his own repressive "father-land," which seems to hover in judgment over his Polish characters like a vengeful Old Testament patriarch" (1997:1).

Both Kickasola and Perlmutter's political readings of *The Decalogue* are important and noteworthy. Given Kieslowski's recent status as a postmodern

obscurantist, who supposedly abandoned the serious political work of the social documentary to explore various New Age themes concerned with our spiritual interconnectivity, both political approaches to Kieslowski's earliest fictional works are welcome. But while I am indebted to these earlier critiques, neither interpretation is satisfactory. Kickasola's political observations, for example, are made merely in passing; Perlmutter's reading is much more advanced, but her notion that the decline of the family refers to political problems does not provide much substance: what does the decline of the family really imply? Does the difficult Father-Figure refer to political corruption, housing problems, or the impossibility of finding a coherent social identity?

Subsequently, as a corrective, in this chapter I will provide a detailed map of some of the concrete social conditions that constitute *The Decalogue's* historical context (socialist Poland on the verge of a capitalistic revolution, the failure of Poland's mass housing, the creation of the socialist city, etc.). To do so I will focus on perhaps one of the most crucial, yet overlooked, aspects of *The Decalogue*: the film's depiction of domestic and urban space. Indeed, since the entire series is set around a single apartment complex in Warsaw (the apartment building is the home of all the main characters) the series provides an evocative opportunity to explore how the architectural environment is tied to ideas about the nation. As Kiril Stanilov (2007) writes, there is a pertinent need to understand the transition from socialist to post-socialistic societies through changes in urban form since architecture provides a durable record of previous political and social environments. This kind of study, he writes, is important because urban space plays an active role in structuring social relations. As such, explorations of the architectural environment can give us clues to

how different political environments relate to specific geo-political issues like “resource allocation, quality of life, and the economic wellbeing of cities” (2007:5).

While most critics refer to the dreary apartment complex, which houses and frames all the characters’ moral journeys, there has been little attempt at moving beyond mere description to determine how Kieslowski’s representation of the home opens the series up to a broader socio-political analysis. Even when a more political reading of the architectural environment is referenced, it is unfortunately made only in passing. Joseph Kickasola mentions the apartment complex briefly, arguing that the building represents the frayed site of Polish community, a home life that is imbued with precarious and uncertain identities. As he writes:

The apartment complex functions as the battle-scarred immanent ground. Within this context of community a strained cohabitation that Kieslowski will probe for true human connections, the themes of home and family persist in every episode. A child is lost in I, gained in II. A family is tested and threatened in III, while the very definition of family is questioned in IV. V demonstrates the devastation of losing a family member, whereas VI demonstrates the effects of not having a family. VII involves the interfamilial struggle over a child, and VIII involves a young girl in need of parental protection. IX exhibits the delicacy of bond between spouses, and X exhibits the delicacy and necessity of bonds between siblings. The home is where we receive our first sense of identity and learn how to relate to others. In this fragile, personal arena Kieslowski confronts us with the heaviest issues in human experience (2004:166).

In “Any Town? Post-communist Warsaw in Juliusz Machulski's Girl Guide (1995) and Kiler (1997),” Ewa Mazierska looks at various representations of Warsaw in films from the 1980’s and 1990s. In her overview she also provides a short description of *The Decalogue’s* poor and abysmal urban infrastructure and the apartment block’s lack of community and hospitality:

In the 1980s the most interesting portrayal of Warsaw was provided by two television series: *Dekalog* (1988) by Krzysztof Kieslowski and *Alternatywy 4* (4 *Alternatywy Street*, 1981), a satirical comedy by Stanislaw Bareja, director of *Every Rose Has Thorns*. Both were set in housing estates, far from the city centre, Ursynow in *Dekalog* and Natolin in *4 Alternatywy Street*. Both estates consisted of

ugly, poor quality blocks with no cultural or community centres such as cinemas, pubs or restaurants. Even the roads were hardly passable with potholes and puddles of water. ...In spite of many similarities between the urban design, Kieslowski and Bareja gave a very different view of life in an apartment block. Kieslowski's characters lived in almost complete anonymity, shut in their flats, unable and unwilling to talk to their neighbors. In Bareja's comedy, on the other hand, they created a tightly knit community. This was partly due to the caretaker who introduced an almost Stalinist regime to the block for which he was responsible. He forced the inhabitants to take part in many communal activities, such as cleaning the block's surroundings or organizing festivals. Eventually, they forged an informal coalition to overcome his power (1999:516).

While both Kickasola and Mazierska draw links between the dreadful state of the apartment building and problems in community life, Marek Haltof frames his analysis of the dreary and sad condition of the building in terms of the historical importance of Poland's experiment with mass housing. For Haltof perhaps the most interesting part of *The Decalogue's* damned portrait of the housing block is the fact that, prior to the release of the series, Poland's mass housing units were actually perceived as signs of progress. As Haltof writes,

Prior to the Decalogue series, Warsaw tenement blocks by and large did not provide the scenery for existential television dramas. These places were, after all, symbols of development in an underdeveloped country, symbols of the communal way of life. Given that representatives of all strata of society lived there, and that numerous people wanted to move there (and could not because of the shortage of apartments), it comes as no surprise that this was the setting for success stories about social advancement (2004: 76).

Aside from these three brief references to *The Decalogue's* construction of urban and architectural space, there has been very little analysis of how the home in the series is a potent sign of the communal and territorial problems affecting *contemporary* Poland. Indeed, in my analysis the building will be shown to perform an important structural role in the series, as the building acts as a kind of narrative thread that weaves together all the separate episodes in an extended meditation on the problems of living in contemporary Polish society. Additionally, a survey of the materiality of

the apartment uncovers traces and residual signs of the former life of the nation and its relationship to socialist societies.

Specifically, in my reading of the apartment complex, the series of homes presented in the show will serve as a complex metaphor for the precarious state of the Polish nation. As David Morley writes, in *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, historically the home has always been intricately linked with the nation state or homeland, wherein the feeling of being at home referred not only to one's local place of residence or community, but was extended symbolically to encompass familiarity with a larger geographic environment, a territory that encompassed the shared values of an entire people. To be at home ideally meant to be at home wherever one was situated within the nation. While the interchangeability of these two terms can be discovered in many national cultures, for Morley, thinking about the nation as a kind of home is particularly pertinent in the context of Germany, especially with regards to the German notion of the *Heimat*. A term that can be traced back to the philosophy of Johann Herder, the idea of the *Heimat* does not refer only to the home's location. Rather, the concept is a polyvalent term that conjoins ideas of the home with those of friendship, security, solidarity, and the greatness of the nation. As Morely writes in reference to the work of Ghassan Hage:

Ghassan Hage argues that national identity is "always mediated by local experience at the level of home, family, village or neighbourhood"- and even wider spaces." In this process communal intimacy is reconciled with ideas of national greatness as the nation is idealised as a kind of hometown writ large, a socio-geographical environment into whose comforting security we may sink. The idea of *Heimat* functions particularly to link the scattered fringes of German-speakers "to a specific past and tradition that are linked to common values, ideal, customs, and location"; thus it follows that "to be able to participate in this *Heimat* requires an identification which is at least ethnic if not racial" (2000:33).

Just as the idea of the home has historically included the idea of being secure within the borders of the nation, to bring together a people that may be scattered across space and time, in my analysis the apartment complex will stand in for this idealized world of national unity. However, by emphasizing the apartment complex's disrepair, its inability to protect the tormented lives of so many domestic peoples, the home in the series becomes an (un)homely space, a site of neglect that provides metaphors for the precarious nature of the nation state. That is, in my reading all the domestic battles provide a complex allegory for the ambivalent conditions of Poland's momentous shift from a centralized, one-party political system to a de-centralized one based in a global, liberal economy. As we will see, at times this picture of the nation will appear, like the building itself, rather bleak and hopeless. Other times, the peril of enduring a world of uncertainty will subside and a glimmer of hope about what may unfold in the future will be encountered.

Finally, in my analysis the fragile home(land) will be read in terms of two temporal dimension: first, like Kieslowski's earlier involvement with the Solidarity Movement, in which he used the social documentary to critique the political and social problems brought about by Poland's socialist revolution, the apartment complex will be read in terms of Poland's past, especially its difficult encounter with socialism. On the other hand, what separates Kieslowski's melodramatic mode of critique from his previous work in the social documentary is the way he moves on to attend to Poland's uncertain future. Thus, while the apartment complex embodies the failed project of socialist urban planning and social reform, the home is positioned equally in terms of Poland's uncertain place within a multinational world order, as it verges on the brink of a capitalistic revolution.

The Apartment Complex: At Home in the Socialist City and the Global Beyond

One of the most poignant facets of *The Decalogue* is its choice of setting. As the home of all the characters, the gray and dreary apartment complex acts as an important narrative container, as the building provides a sense of spatial and temporal continuity for the viewer, who must weave together the series' disparate stories. Along with this narrative role, however, the building also serves as a rich and manifold sign of the different hopes, dreams, desires and conflict entailed in the notion of finding a home. This latter function is particularly important when considering that the apartment complex is easily recognizable as an example of Poland's ubiquitous experiments with communist mass housing. Indeed, as a vital piece of Poland's architectural past, and its attempt at creating the ideal communist society, it is important to remember that this is not just any apartment complex. This is not a building from New York or Paris. Rather the apartment evokes images of Poland's past, especially the nation's previous engagement with various urban design practices and discourses.

In the next section I want to explore how the series relates the dilemmas experienced within the domestic interior to the larger nationalistic environment, especially the failed project of communist mass housing. Specifically, I wish to explore how geographic spaces in the film are persistently structured and framed around the idea and experience of borders. As Katherine Shonefield explains in her book *Walls Have Feelings: Architecture Film and the City*, cinema and architecture are related in the way both enable the demarcation of spatial borders. This can be evidenced in the way various architectural forms, like walls, windows, streets, and

doors situate and maintain what is considered inside and outside, what is public and private and what is excluded and included.⁶

However, not only is architecture important for the creation of borders but it can be used to purify space, as it can help monitor what moves between these spaces and what is ultimately left out. As such, film and architectural space can retain a normative function by marking and maintaining rigid boundaries: they can, for example, situate where one is (whether I am inside or outside), what kinds of behavior are proper and acceptable and who or what has legitimate access to certain spaces. At the same time, these barriers can and often do become blurred. What is inside can become external, what is public can become private and so forth. Thus, while architecture helps maintain the order of interiorities and exteriorities, these same purified zones can become hybrid and permeable. As Shonefield writes, “The idea of the hybrid is the opposite of the pure. The hybrid straddles two or more classes; its edges are unclear, and difficult to delineate, to draw a line around the hybrid doesn’t have an identifiable, categorisable form. The hybrid obscures the possibility of its reduction to an original set of parts or classes” (2000:4).

In *The Decalogue* the presence of hybrid spaces, and, in particular, the blurring of the demarcation between public and private spaces, is one of the key devices for situating the series’ major themes. On one hand, the production of rigid boundaries and the desire for seclusion and the retreat into the home will represent the desire to establish the nation’s security, to keep out what is not a part of the homeland. On the other hand, as we will see, since every apartment in the complex houses some devastating family tragedy, the (un)homely state of the building can be read as the dis-

⁶ See Chapter 1 for an exploration of what Shonefield calls “the defense of the border.”

unified state of the nation, as evidence of the fact that fissures and fragmentation have seeped into the inside, dismantling the nation's borders.

A particularly evocative example in the series that focuses on presenting the viewer with the permeability of the lines between interior and exterior space is seen in Kieslowski's use of establishing shots. Crucial to this pattern of establishing shots is an opening shot that provides the viewer with a foreboding image of the exterior façade of the massive apartment complex. Then, once the external environment is established, and the spectator is brought within the total geographic territory, the camera will shift focus, suddenly moving inward into one of the apartments, uncertainly gazing upon the private lives of one of the building's inhabitants.

This transition - from barren images of the building's exterior walls to intimate shots inside the building - is notable not only for its role in evoking how the barriers between inside and outside will be constantly breached in the series, but for the way in which these shots focalize the immense importance the exterior environment plays in the melodramas, as if the building's façade were a character in its own right, a force that oversees and influences the character's lives directly. In short, for Kieslowski, the apartment building is not just a neutral backdrop, but is the series' paternal container, an overarching structure that throughout the series will constantly changes roles, becoming anything from a place of uncertain dangers and crimes, to a hopeful space that brings people together.

In the first episode this framing technique proves to be quite unnerving, as the building, especially its immense vertical scale, is pitted against the viewer's perceptual faculties. After beginning with a very brief and inexplicable scene in which two remote and sorrowful characters somehow seem "telepathically" connected by the

image of an unknown boy, the camera moves on to frame the architectural environment. Straining upward at an extreme angle, the camera looks up, attempting to frame the entire building, to contain and order the series of columns through a single shot. However, the task proves untenable. Instead of ordering the building, the extreme angle ends up producing a dizzying effect. For no matter how hard the camera attempts to order the structure, by revealing its point of culmination, the columns continue to rise into infinity, leaving all sense of the ground behind, as we are engulfed by the wide open sky. Like in other episodes, the central themes of the entire series are suggested in this brief opening: while the building will appear to be the “ground” for all the private moral dilemmas, the native homeland that will envelop and care for the characters, certainty and culmination will never be gained, as the character’s lives will become “ungrounded” by the inexplicability of the environment.

In other episodes the movement from exterior to interior space is reversed, as we often begin in the private sphere only to have the scene quickly shift to some inexplicable outside environment. Again the effect is dizzying. Since the scenes shift between private and public spaces quickly and without any apparent motivation, it becomes difficult for the viewer to apprehend what is exactly happening in the scenes. We, like the characters, are placed in a position of epistemological uncertainty. In episode nine, for example, we are immediately thrown into the private bedroom of Hanka, who awakens abruptly and extends her arm out to the other side of the bed, as though she were searching for some lost lover, body or memory. The scene then abruptly shifts to the outside, as we hear a man being diagnosed by his doctor as being impotent. Whether the man is connected to the woman or not is not made apparent,

but the editing transition creates the feeling that the woman was actually in the room and, like the viewer, privy to their private exchange.

Here, again, the opening sequences lay the ground for the chief themes of the episode. In this case, the capability to listen in on others or to be in two places simultaneously is quite fitting. As we learn, the impotent man is indeed related to the woman: having left his wife because of his sexual incompetence, the husband has returned only to discover that his wife has taken a new lover. Driven mad by the threat of the other, the husband decides to play a sophisticated game of surveillance, wherein the desire to know his wife's whereabouts leads the husband down a slippery slope of intra-familial spying. He tampers with the home phone in order to listen in on his wife's calls; he even hides in the closet of a bedroom to catch the two in the act. Subsequently, in direct opposition to the opening scene, where it seems like the wife is spying on the husband's private life, in the episode it is the impotent husband who repeatedly attempts to break through his wife's private sphere. The result is a home (or national) life where no zone of intimacy is secure, where mistrust and betrayal prevail and everything becomes a calculated game of prying on the other.

As we have seen, the architectural environment in *The Decalogue* is repeatedly used to create a contrast between inside and outside spaces. Yet, as evidenced in the examples above, the barrier between both worlds is never rigid or impenetrable, but this line is constantly undermined, crossed over and thwarted, as the character's private concerns are wedded to people and places outside the home. This mixture of spaces, I believe, explains Kieslowski's fondness for focusing in on windows and other transparent surfaces and objects. Unlike solid barriers, such as concrete walls, which firmly uphold the rigid distinction between inside and outside, windows challenge this

dichotomy, condensing both inside and outside onto a single surface. Indeed, as a solid surface that can prevent people from entering the inside, windows do offer some protection from the exterior world. Yet, as a transparent medium, windows equally provide people and technologies the opportunity to peer into the inside, to enter the domestic sphere without being physically present (more on this later).

Now that I have situated the series' use of interior and exterior space, I will turn to look at how this geographic division relates to a specific historical context: the socialist city and the development of the communist mass housing projects. For if the home in the series is undeniably tragic, a place that both internally and externally exists on the brink of collapse, in part this morass can be explained through the apartment's reference to Poland's failed experiments in architectural design.

A Socialist Complex: Mapping the Communist Home

Throughout *The Decalogue* everyday environments and objects - windows, doors, telephones, walls - are presented in order to examine the problems of living together, especially the way the family home is never a pure interior capable of protecting the dweller from the uncertainty of the outside. I want to turn now and look at the how the apartment complex's exteriority conjures up a specific historical context. After all, *The Decalogue's* mass apartment complex is not any form of urban architecture: while the apartment clearly belongs to the International Style, with its reinforced concrete, homogeneous exteriors and rationalized planning, it is important to remember that this is not an apartment complex in downtown Manhattan or a housing complex in Montreal.⁷ Rather, the apartment building is a ubiquitous example

⁷ Interestingly, both socialist and capitalist nations shared a common interest in the rationalization of modern architecture. Just as many western architects were influenced by the 1930 Third Congress meeting of the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne),

and reminder of the mass housing projects that belonged to Poland's communist legacy. As such the building is a pertinent sign of the way building design was utilized as a crucial feature in the creation of the ideal socialist society.

To understand the intricate ways in which political ideology and urban development coincide in the series in the next section I will provide a very brief overview of the socialist city,⁸ especially the role state centered planning and the suburbs played in modern socialistic urbanization. It is common in cultural studies to focus on the suburbs as the prime site of the American Dream, where access to the single family home and the automobile formed the key ingredients in articulating the ideal home. In *The Decalogue* spaces outside the city center, like the suburbs, belonged to a very different articulation, one in which the high rise, not the single family home, became the means to creating the proper home. After describing the socialist city I will then outline how *The Decalogue* both critiques this urban legacy and anticipates a new phase of urban development, one in which the centralizing tendencies of socialist ideology gives way to a new techno-sphere based on high technology and decentralized systems of spatial organization and transnational mobility.

which featured speakers like Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, communist architecture also maintained a firm conviction in the might of technology and rationalized planning. This is particularly evident in the creation of the socialist "neighbor units", wherein reinforced concrete, the separation of work and home and monotone exteriors became the modern solution to a new kind of modern living (Duanfang Lu, 2006: 23, 24).

⁸ The notion of the socialist city is a somewhat dubious term. Some suggest that the process of urbanization under socialism differs little from urbanization in the west; others argue that socialistic modes of production created a very distinct set of urban practices that warrants the need of a term like socialistic cities. It is not my intention here to engage in these debates, but to outline some of those pertinent features of Poland's urban situation that are quite dissimilar to urban practices in the United States. For a good overview of these debates see French and Hamiltun's French and Hamilton's *Socialist City: Spatial Structure and Urban Policy*, Judit Bodnar's *Fin de Millénaire Budapest: Metamorphoses of Urban Life and Grzegorz Weclawowicz's Contemporary Poland: Space and Society*.

One of the contradictions associated with the rise and spread of Soviet-style socialism relates to the development of the industrial city. Whereas the basic tenets of the communist ideology sought to eradicate any substantial social distinction between cities and the rural countryside, by providing all areas with the same resources and social benefits, in reality a very different pattern of spatial development emerged. In fact, much like other western nations during the early twentieth century, spatial development under the burgeoning drive of industrialization witnessed an ineluctable bias towards the city. As Jiri Musil writes, regarding the socialist process of urbanization: “The 1931 Central Party Committee resolution rejected the decentralization theory and recommended that the town-country gap should be eliminated not by abolishing cities but by transforming them, while simultaneously carrying out a socialist transformation of the countryside, bringing it under the influence of progressive urban culture” (Musil, 2004:28).

As many satellite socialist countries, such as Poland, underwent an intense and unprecedented process of industrialization, it was the city that quickly became the prime emblem for socialist progress. Speaking about how the Polish authorities used the city of Tychy to both solve the problem of a shortage in housing and bring light to the supremacy of socialism, Szczepański writes, “The decision to create the city of Tychy was basically political, although it was justified by ecological, social and economic considerations. On the one hand, Tychy was to be a symbolic city, the embodiment of new socialist principles of urbanisation and architecture, while on the other, it was to be an extension of the USIR, where shortage of space restricted further expansion” (Szczepański, 1993:2). Thus, despite an official political ideology that promoted even spatial development, communist countries shared with the

western world an intense investment in the status, development and industrialization of the city (Musil: 2004: 33-36).

Despite this similarity in the growth of the modern industrial city there are differences between socialist and capitalist cities. One of these, which relates to *The Decalogue* involves the development of Soviet Style housing. Whereas in America the post-war solution to housing emphasized the might of private development, especially the creation of individually owned single family homes (Oldenziel and Zachmann:2009), housing in Poland followed the Soviet mode of centralized planning, which emphasized public resources over and beyond private ownership. According to the Muril (2004:39), this lack of private development had a very specific effect on urban organization and housing developments in countries like Poland. As in most post-war countries, housing shortages were an ever present reality in Poland; to deal with these problems Poland relied on a centralized urban planning agency, which sought to remedy the situation by abandoning the city center and developing more peripheral areas outside the city center.

Indeed, according to Alain Bertaud and Bertrand Renaud (1995), since land has no monetary value in a socialist system, there is little incentive to redevelop and reuse specific areas within the city. Instead, whenever new land was required, older industrial areas near the city center were simply abandoned, and suburban land became the prime site for urban development, especially mass housing complexes. Overtime this led to the rapid growth of peripheral parts of the city, as the push to constantly use new peripheral areas caused the city to expand further and further away from the city center.

Subsequently, during the 1960's and 1970's, when Poland witnessed its great surge of mass housing projects, the space allocated for its ubiquitous experiment in socialist design was the peripheral suburbs. Commenting on the socialist urban design strategies, Muril writes:

These policies also began to change urban spatial patterns. City centres, mainly in those cities which had not been destroyed during the Second World War, ceased to evolve. Due to the irrelevancy of location within these cities(brought about as a result of the state monopoly), there were almost no incentives to invest in the city centre, to build new firm headquarters, hotels, banks, department stores, etc. This contributed to the stability of the physical patterns of urban cores and to the preservation of many historical buildings, but also to the decay of the city centres. From the 1960s onwards, a new factor emerged in most Central and Eastern European former socialist countries: the construction of large housing estates. Those were built most often in the outer zones of cities and changed their structure quite considerably” (2004:39).

Unlike the suburbanization of the American city, which rested on the convergence of the single family home, the highway and the automobile, the design of the Polish suburbs rested on a combination of working class ideology, the modern high rise and social homogenization (Weclawowicz: 2005). So while the American suburbs fostered a more privatized approach to dwelling, in the case of Poland the suburbs and its new mass high rises became the site of collective living, as different social groups were supposed to come together and make their home under the same communal roof.⁹

Yet, just as quickly as these housing units were erected, critics and citizens quickly began to see the socialist dream unravel. Waiting lists for a place in the new

⁹ For an excellent study of the way the issue of the home was a vital part of Cold War ideology see Oldenziel and Zachmann's *Cold War Kitchen: Americanization, Technology, and European Users*. Focusing on the Nixon-Khrushchev kitchen debate and the 1959 trade and culture exhibition held in Moscow, which featured a model American kitchen that supposedly showed how the American suburban home embodied the might of free market capitalism, the book shows how innovations in the kitchen were used to insist on the superiority of both capitalistic and socialistic political philosophies.

complexes were extremely long (Lizon, 1996). And while authorities hoped to alleviate these problems over time, the matter worsened as actual construction of new housing plummeted throughout the 70's and 80s (Stanilov: 173-175.) Apartments were also small and hardly modern. For if one of the central ideological features of the good home entailed the coziness of modern amenities, in Poland these luxuries were few and far between. And while it is true that many different social groups lived side by side in the same buildings, the mere proximity of different social classes did not immediately promote social equality (Weclawowicz, 2005). Finally, inefficient land use caused these housing projects to become extremely costly, since more and more infrastructure, such as public transit, heating and water, was required to meet the demands of the rapidly expanding city (Bertaud and Renaud:1995). Subsequently, over time, the visible signs of neglect were apparent, as more and more of these complexes came to resemble communist ghettos rather than utopias of socialist progress.

Thus, when the camera closes in on and frames the mass housing complex throughout *The Decalogue*, it is helpful to place this structure within its socio-historical context, to remind us of how the decline of the home is not merely an issue of moral individuality, but a matter of public policy. For while the prospect of having a home in one of these complexes may have been a dream in the past, for Kieslowski's characters this dream of socialist progress has gone terribly awry: as evidenced by the decaying structure, its bleak and monotone exterior, its crumbling facade and evident disrepair, the building is, in short, an emblem of failure, of the impossibility of finding a happy home to call one's own. Indeed, each of the moral dilemmas witnessed in the series can be read in terms of the failure of this grand project, as Kieslowski turns a critical eye towards the everyday, revealing a not so idealistic world plagued by

uncertainly, rudeness, envy, suspicion, and even murder. In short, the building embodies what Marek S. Szczepański calls the bureaucratic failure of socialist urban policy:

It would seem that the solutions adopted were intended primarily to facilitate urban administration and technical commissioning of the successively built units, as well as to produce a compositionally fixed space. They did not, however, anticipate the stimulation of the processes of social integration and creation of compact local societies living in the various blocks and housing units. The creation of urban space in line with the Charter of Athens, separating place of work from place of residence, creating quasi-autonomous urban units and necessitating everyday work-home travel, was bound from the very beginning to lead to social disintegration of the urban community. In Sjoerd Groenman's concept of the 'empty zone', he stresses the lack of individual and collective identification with the spatial dimension of large housing estates, together with hypertrophic orientation toward the family and apartment space (1993:13).

Undoubtedly, as Perlmutter argues, the unraveling of the family home in *The Decalogue* relates to the face of Kieslowski's "vengeful Old Testament patriarch" - the failed paternity of a communist bureaucracy unable to care for its socialist family. Yet, while it is undoubtedly the case that the series range of familial crises must be read in terms of this socialist past, this critique forms only one half of the picture. The other half faces the uncertainty of Poland's future.

A Present Future – Mapping the Flows of the Post-Industrial City

In *The Decalogue* the apartment complex serves as a sign of Poland's communist past, and the particular urban restructuring processes fostered through socialist ideology. Yet, though the series' representation of the fragile and unhappy home may be read as a sign of Kieslowski's overall critique of this socialist legacy, and its subsequent decay, other socio-political signs are littered throughout the series which point toward Poland's shift from the insular world of socialism and into a multinational global political economy. From this perspective, the fragile spaces of the

(un)homely do not exclusively call upon the challenges of Poland's nationalistic past, especially its difficulty in attaining a secure self-generated form of identity. Rather the fragile home can be read as signaling a new world order in which questions of the nation harbor both uncertainty and hope about its place in the network society.

To gauge these signs, however, it is necessary to look beyond the series' explicit focus on family tragedy and focus on some of the more minor incidents and objects presented in the everyday world of the characters. Indeed, as we will see, located subtly in the background of *The Decalogue's* melodramatic stories of familial tragedy and ethical choice is a plethora of everyday material objects - passports, international money orders, personal computers, airports, television screens, telephones, western consumer products and advertisements - that reveal an urban environment in the throes of transition, as Poland's verges on its revolutionary return to a free market economy. For if the apartment complex represents in part the remnants of the socialist city, where communist ideology mixed concretely with the might of industrial technology, elsewhere in the series Kieslowski weaves into focus another system of domestic and everyday signifiers that takes us away from the idea of the home as nation to the idea of the home as nodal point in a multinational, system of cross border flows.

In his book *The World is Watching: Video as Multinational Aesthetics*, Dennis Redmond argues that though the television series definitely feels cinematic, *The Decalogue* should not be categorized in terms of a mode of cinematic aesthetics, which Redmond associates with the nation state and the development of national cinema. *The Decalogue* instead is an example of the multinational flows of video culture. For Redmond, national cinema is about forging a unified national identity, wherein a select

group of directors attempt to develop a particular film language that addresses what it means to belong to a specific territory. Thus, the social documentaries of Polish directors can be differentiated from French neo-realism, which in turn can be distinguished from classical Hollywood films, etc. Video culture, on the contrary, is inherently multinational and hybrid. This hybrid and international quality not only has to do with the speed of video cultures, since data can be easily transmitted across various information networks, but with the ways in which video culture is also about combining the language, style and content of a range of cultural objects from across the world. Given these dynamics, video aesthetics cannot be traced to any specific place, let alone an entire nation.

As an example, Redmond repeatedly argues that the uniqueness of *The Decalogue* resides in the way it joins a range of distinctly Western genres and film stylistics to explore a series of distinctly Eastern European characters and themes. From this formal perspective, then, *The Decalogue* exists as a hybrid medium, a half-way house, to borrow a line from Homi Bhabha, where different artistic cultures meet and converge. As Bhabha (1997) writes, with the ever-present reality of displacement, exile and rampant migration comes new hybrid styles of art. Since many displaced artists do not feel like they belong anywhere, or are confronted with the contradictory reality of being at home in a homeless world, hybrid art represents a perpetual state of being-in between, a kind of half-way house of artistic expression. By mixing different cultural forms and themes, *The Decalogue* represents for Redmond this new reality of hybrid cultures, a world of transnational movement that directly reflects upon its own multinational existence.

At first glance it might seem that Redmond's rejection of the nationalist attributes of *The Decalogue* contradict what I have been saying about the apartment complex and its evocation of Poland's nationalistic past. In part this is true. Focusing mostly on the series' formal aesthetics and international production values rather than the themes and content of the episodes, Redmond's analysis avoids, I think, some of the series' more subtle features. For example, given the rich historical significance of communist mass housing, it is difficult not to see the apartment complex as a palpable sign of the failure and decay of Polish socialism. Furthermore, given Kieslowski's deep involvement in the Solidarity Movement and his previous critiques of the Polish government, it is hard to imagine that the series' nuanced exploration of the life world of Warsaw bypasses wholesale questions of the nation.

What I like about Redmond's analysis, though, is the way he sees the series in terms of a multinational world of movement and flows, a transnational order where people, commerce and material objects are circulated through a range of nodal points. It is this "transnational" aspect of the series that corresponds to what I have been saying about the series' shift toward the future and the uncertainty and hope surrounding Poland political transformations. But what interests me about the series' depiction of multinational movements is not only how *The Decalogue's* formal aesthetics borrow from other video cultures or the way the series represents an international co-production, but, equally importantly, are the ways the domestic sphere contains the everyday traces of these movements.

As I mentioned above, nestled in the background of each episode is a series of everyday objects that point towards a social world consumed by different kinds of circulation. This may involve the periodic reference to western consumer products,

like the Sony Walkman the punky train agent listens to in episode 7; or it may be the wondrous hair growth drug referenced in episode 4; it may involve the range of American paraphernalia and advertisements that are littered throughout the series; or it could be the endless references to international travel, time zones and passports. Either way, what is revealed is that within the home are the material manifestations of a cultural and social world where motility and circulation are paramount.

Perhaps one of most interesting figures that can help explicate some of these geo-political changes involves *The Decalogue's* special reoccurring character (known often as the 'silent observer'). The silent observer is a special character who appears in all of the episodes; but in each episode he takes on a different character. In episode one, for example, he appears as a homeless man; in episode 2 he is seen working in a hospital. Added to these mysterious powers of reincarnation, is the way the silent observer seems to possess some kind of magical, telepathic powers. He seems to be able to read into the future and by doing so foretell the fateful outcome of the other characters. Finally, the silent observer maintains a promiscuous relationship to space. That is, unlike the other character's, who are unable to escape their confining environments and are trapped in all kinds of devastating situations, the silent observer embodies a mobile form of home, a home on the move, as he is never confined to any space or situation but moves effortlessly from place to place like a vagrant (more on this later).

In virtually all readings of the series, special attention is given to this figure. While there have been numerous ways of interpreting this figure, most interpretations surround two basic claims: the first is that the special figure represents the omnipresence of God; the second is that he represents the ideals of moral conscience.

For Redmond, neither of these perspectives is convincing. Instead, taking a geo-political approach, Redmond argues that the omnipresence of this strange and enigmatic character is best understood, not as a sign of some universal moral authority, but as a world system that is highly dependent on new kinds of geo-political movements – from the international circulation of cultural products, like music videos, to the real-time speed of advanced communications technologies. That is, by possessing the ability to freely cross over the film's diegetic barrier, a capability that allows him to be everywhere and free of any local environment (the character is not contained to any particular spatial environment but morphs from episode to episode), the silent observer represents the unhinging of local places by the force of globalization.

I tend to concur with Redmond's interpretation. In the opening of episode one, for example, the viewer is presented with a unsettling juxtaposition that I think captures quite poignantly the idea that in an age of real-time transmissions the meaning and experience of local places change: as the scene opens the viewer is presented with the image of a woman (Aunt Irena) crying in the city center. Then we are suddenly jolted back to the suburbs where we see a teary-eyed silent observer, who appears to be homeless, as he sits huddled before an open fire in front of the apartment complex. Though they are disconnected spatially and located in different parts of Warsaw, the editing techniques suggest their instantaneous connection, as though both were participating in some kind of emotional or spiritual communion. For Redmond, the coincidence of these two teary-eyed figures does not signal the presence of some pseudo-mystical powers. Rather, the image of telepathy conjured up here is informatic, as the connection between the two estranged people provides an

allegory for a shift in multinational telecommunications, as their simultaneous communication provides an image of the instantaneous flows of data in an age of real-time information.

On its own, the idea that the telepathic connectivity between Aunt Irena and the silent-observer represents the world of contemporary telecommunications is far from convincing; the scene, deep with somber and emotional overtones, does seem to support the idea that what is shared between the two is some kind of religious or spiritual connectivity, a trust in faith, or an encounter with the incomprehensible, thereby situating the silent observer as a kind of overseeing God or Angel. However, what makes Redmond's interpretation more probable is not just the way both share a teary-eyed moment but the object of their sorrow: as Aunt Irena walks past a store front window she becomes captivated by a television set, broadcasting images of a young boy running in a school. The boy, we learn later, is Aunt Irena's nephew, who had just died tragically in an accident.

Broadcast over the television, appearing for everyone in the public, the dispersed images of the boy provide a metaphor for a world of instant communication, a world where spatial boundaries do not hinder the circulation of information. That is, just as the two strangers are able to commune with each other from a distance, the presence of this newscast attests to the way in which, in an age of broadcast media, private stories of tragedy and anguish become communal events, shared stories that are consumed daily from inside the home. In this way, the shared anguish over the boy represent a common theme in communications studies, where broadcast media enables the outside world to enter the private home, while at the same time, intimate stories and private affairs can be openly broadcasted to the public.

Here, once again, *The Decalogue* invites us to reconsider how we think of inside and outside spaces, as the strange connectivity between the strangers acts as a metaphor for how in a time of global broadcast media private and public events switch sides, as the locality of the home can be dispersed across various media networks.

A second way in which the silent observer can be read in terms of the flexibility and motility of multinational flows is in terms of the range of physical movements the special figure is engaged with throughout the series. As mentioned above, at the start of episode one, the silent observer is shown to possess some special telepathic powers, communicating with Aunt Irena at distance. Yet, while some kind of signal or recognition seems to traverse the space between the two characters, throughout the entire scene both remain absolutely still, immobile, their messages traveling through an invisible space that requires no physical mobility. Here, we find a perfect image of the rapid, invisible movements of a global real-time transmission system, where one's mobility occurs via various communications networks. However, throughout the series, this image of an immobile silent observer is rare. In fact, in most episodes the special character is associated with a range of relentless physical movements, which enable him to traverse the spaces of the city: in episode 3 he is seen rowing across a river; in episode 4 he speeds pass in an automobile; in episode 6 he is found returning home from a trip, carrying several suitcases; and in episode 8 he is seen cycling across a newly constructed roadway.

If, according to Redmond, the silent observer represents the new spaces of instant communications, how do we account for this range of older mobile technologies? Certainly, items like automobiles, bicycles and boats hardly form the emblematic technologies of our hyper-mobile contemporary societies. But, the age of

global migration does not need to be solely understood in terms of electronic motility, or the invisible flows of data. On the contrary, a range of physical movements, from the movement of bodies across different nations to new trade agreements that see products and labor circulate freely across many borders, are equally integral to global societies. This is the story that Manuel Castells tells when he explores the characteristics of the network society: for Castells new methods of broadcasting information, from the World Wide Web, mobile phones and Global Positioning Systems, have made space much more flexible, since any space in a communications network can make an infinite number of global connections; but alongside these spaces of flows are numerous physical movements, such as the movement of immigrants, labor and goods and services, that are required for the network society to function (Castells: 2009).

From this perspective the intense restlessness of the silent observer can be read as a general sign of the rampant restlessness of a migratory society that is perpetually on the move. Indeed, throughout *The Decalogue* there is no shortage of everyday objects that signify a world preoccupied by international flows, transitions and a general feeling of being uprooted. Take, for example, the series' perpetual reference to foreign countries, passports and international travel: in episode one we learn that Pawel's mother lives in a distant, foreign country; we are never given the actual name of the country but know only that there is a significant difference in the time zones of both parents, as Pawel must wait up quite late to receive a phone call from his mother. In episode two, Dorota is a musician, who not only references her experience with the medical profession in America, but also has a lover, who presumably resides in Western Europe; in the same episode Dorota uses her passport

as a sign of identification to receive a piece of mail. In episode four Anka takes her father to the airport. His destination also seems to be another westernized country, as his friend asks him to purchase some western wonder drug that is supposed to help with hair growth; in episode six Tomek describes his absent friend as an up-rooted soldier with the United Nations, who is currently serving in Syria; Tomek also is described as an orphan who is fluent in many different languages; in episode seven Majka threatens to emigrate to Canada with her daughter; and finally in episode nine we learn that Hanka is a sales agent for the Dutch airline KLM.

Subsequently, through all these signs of movement Kieslowki's creates an urban environment, wherein the problem and promise of the family home are always contextualized and framed within a world of international travel – as if the (un)homely was directly related to this ubiquitous elsewhere. Indeed, while it is difficult not to think of the absent mother in episode one and the fact that her presence in the family home might have changed the outcome of her son's tragic death, in episodes 7 and 10, this "global" elsewhere forms a luring space of hope and desire: for Majka it is a space of safety, where she can take her son in order avoid her domineering family; in episode 10 it is a space of immense profit, as the two brothers learn that their deceased father's stamp collection will fetch millions in the western market.

A final way in which I believe the special figure can be aligned with the flexible spaces of contemporary societies involves the space of narrative. Unlike most narrative films, which demand that its characters remain fixed to a specific place in the story, and are unable to exist outside the film's diegesis, in *The Decalogue* the silent observer continually breaks this law. By appearing in each episode as a different character, with a different occupation and social positions the special figure is given

the freedom to cross over the diegetic barrier. As such, in *The Decalogue* the viewer must contend with two different and contradictory modes of narrative space. On one hand, for the central characters, space and time is continuous – the main story world of *The Decalogue* is consistent, ordered and temporally linear. This consistency is evidenced in part by the way the apartment complex frames each of the stories, since all of the central characters reside in the same place. Thus, the central characters, whose lives are in tatters, are forced to live out their time in the same shared and collective space, accumulating a range of moral dilemmas that coalesce around the same geographic environment. This is the home of containment, a home that feels more like a prison cell than a space of security and liberty. On the other hand, the silent observer is free from this diegetic law: he can jump from episode to episode, change his social character and morph into other people; this is a world of virtual space, of absolute flexibility and motility, a place where a man can be homeless in one episode and a doctor in another. Subsequently, unlike the other characters that remains static, for the special character space and time is not consistent and continuous but dispersed, fragmented and disordered.

There are two interrelated ways to interpret this bifurcation of narrative space. Maintaining a contradictory spatial position, both here and not here, both inside and outside the narrative, the silent figure again can be read as a representative of the fragmentation and dispersal of space in a global geo-political environment. This position, obviously favors the space of the silent figure over and above the rest of the characters. Yet at the same time it is important to acknowledge how for all other characters space is rigid and narrow; trapped in their apartment complex, forced to contend with a contingent world that is uncertain, ripe with anxiety and moral

collapse, the central characters do not possess the freedom to simply jump ship, to remake themselves as a new and refashioned character. Indeed, while the silent character can remain in the flexible world of virtuality, becoming someone else in each episode, for the rest they are all stuck with the Real, forced to make do with the confines of their situation. Here I think *The Decalogue* foreshadows the coming of a “digital” or “geo-political” divide, the way the issues of global mobility need to be understood in terms of the poles of privilege and neglect: while for some, especially the well-to-do, access to a world of international travel and circulation is a luxury, for many motility is either a forced prospect or a luxury that remains forever out of reach.

So far I have considered the series in broad strokes, showing how the decline of the family home refers to the uncertainty of both the past and future and the difficulty of attaining a proper national identity. In the remaining part of the chapter I will move on to provide specific analysis of several of the episodes, in order to explore how the individual episodes relate to these overall themes of the family home, locality, globalism and the different spatial realities Poland faces as it enters a new socio-political order; the episodes I will analyze include episodes 6 and 10.

Episode 6: Remote Control or Contact at a Distance

As mentioned previously, in virtually all of the episodes the interface between exterior and interior spaces is blurred, a process that leads to the breakdown of the stability and security afforded to the family home. In short, everywhere one looks in the series what one encounters is a (un)homely world where spatial borders are easily breached. However, despite this extensive meditation on the malleability of space and its effect on the home, at no point during the series are we given a consistent image or idea of what the decline of the family means. Rather, throughout the series, a range of

diverse representations of the home are given, such that the entire series can be seen as a multifaceted discourse on the problems, hopes, anxieties and freedom surrounding the nation and the uncertainty associated with political transformation.

An excellent example of the way spatial representations in the series can evoke alternate images of the home involves the different ways the boundaries of inside and outside are represented in episodes 6 and 10. While in episode 6 the home's boundaries are crossed in the name of love, obsession and desire, as the love-struck Tomek uses a range of manipulative practices to spy on Magda, an amorous woman whose apartment window is directly across from Tomek's, in episode 10 the inheritance of a family fortune leads two brothers to become unhealthily obsessed with defending the boundaries of the home. The defense of the inside even reaches the absurd point where one brother is expected to sacrifice a kidney in order to keep their fortune intact. Subsequently, while in the former episode, the defense of the home is momentarily breached in order that a new connection can be forged, in the latter, all connections to the outside are exorcised through a complex system of surveillance.

In the opening scene of episode 6 the major themes of the episode are captured succinctly through the use of a reflective glass surface. As mentioned previously, Kieslowski often uses glass surfaces to show how the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred. In the case of episode 6 this blurring of boundaries involves using the reflective properties of a window pane to overlap images of two strangers – Magda, a sexually adventurous artist and Tomek, a shy and timid postal worker. The scene I am referencing occurs in a post office, where Tomek is found speaking to Magda behind one of those standard glass window panes. Since the shot

is taken from her point of view, the reflective properties of the window creates a doubling effect, wherein Tomek's image overlaps with the translucent image of the woman, thereby conjoining both in a virtual space of interconnectivity. Interestingly, while the glass pane is designed to keep Tomek's work space separate from the space of the customer, here the boundaries of inside and outside are contaminated, as both images share the same visual plane.

Like in episode 9, where a husband breaches his wife's privacy by spying on her through the telephone, in episode 6 the central narrative trajectory involves how Tomek uses a range of strategies and technologies to breach the home of Magda. Like Pawel in episode 1, who shows a certain propensity for controlling things from a distance (the boy develops a primitive version of a "Smart House," wherein simple activities, like turning on and off lights are controlled from a central computer) Tomek is also a master of "remote control." But unlike Pawel, who is content to exert remote control over a system of things, Tomek's system of influence entails monitoring people, as he seeks to enter the space of Magda through a crafty game of surveillance. In the next few sections I will explore how Tomek's game of remote control relates to the theme of the (un)homely, especially how his game of surveillance fits in with the series' overall geo-political themes of the breakdown of boundaries. In doing so, I hope to challenge any interpretation that would see Tomek's peeping-tom antics solely in terms of the traditional cinematic concepts of scopophilia or voyeurism. While Tomek's fascination with Magda is amorous at times and entails the use of some optical technologies, Tomek's peeping tom antics, I argue, have little to do with the masculine world of visual dominance and a panoptical system of surveillance; rather

the act of spying conjures up images of a networked world where control is exercised through interconnectivity.

The Network of Remote Control

Undoubtedly one of the prominent features of the contemporary media landscape is the ability to control things and people from a distance. Indeed, control and contact may be two of the most prominent terms describing life in a networked society. At times this ubiquitous connectivity can appear to be rather quite banal, as in the ability to check email or telephone messages from outside the home. However, as Steven Shaviro writes, quite often life in the network society takes on a paranoid and suspicious dimension, as people may feel like their strings are being constantly pulled by some invisible force, some unidentified point in the network. Citing Deleuze's observation that for Foucault the panoptical system of exhaustive visual monitoring has been replaced by a control society, Shaviro argues that it is by merely being connected to others through a whole assortment of everyday interfaces (email, personal computers, television etc.) that power and influence is exercised in today's network societies. Even more, unlike the panoptical system where power is hidden and functions by existing outside the everyday, power under the control society is quite quotidian and familiar. As Shaviro writes:

We're moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication" (1995, 174). Once we have all been connected, there is no longer any need for the Panopticon's rigid, relentless, centralized gaze. The new forces of control are flexible, slack, and distributed. In a totally networked world, where every point communicates directly with every other point, power is no longer faceless and invisible. Instead, it works in plain sight. Its smiley face is always there to greet us. We are fully aware that its eyes are looking at us; it even encourages us to stare back (2003:31).

Tomek's game of surveillance, I think, represents this move from the panoptical to the control society. Like a panoptical system, which watches unseen, the traditional voyeur gains power by being able to see the other while remaining completely invisible and unknown. The key is not to let the other return the gaze. But this is not at all what Tomek does. While Tomek begins by following the typical behavior of the peeping-tom, he changes his position very early on by directly confessing to Magda that he has been spying on her. "I've seen you crying," Tomek states to Magda in the street. "I've been peeping on you." Almost from the beginning, then, Tomek breaks the cardinal rule of voyeurism by making himself known, by "working in plain sight." The shift to a control society can also be seen in the method Tomek uses to make contact with Magda: rather than simply using the register of sight as his main mode of contact, Tomek's game of control is much more extensive, as he relies on a range of institutions and technologies - from the postal system, a delivery service and the gas company to the telephone and a telescope - to intrude on Magda's domestic life.

This sophisticated use of everyday communications devices is first seen when Tomek sets up a forced meeting between the two neighbors. As a postal worker, Tomek is placed in a position of privilege, wherein his ability to access Magda's domestic life stems from his ability to monitor and control the circulation of her mail. Indeed, in order to force Magda to meet him, Tomek sends out a series of false messages regarding a mysterious money order that immediately lures Magda into his place of work. Hoping to cash in on her mysterious notice, Magda continues to go back and forth to the post office, demanding the money cited in the notice. But, as the viewer quickly learns, there is no money order. Even worse, when Magda becomes

frustrated over the non-existence of the money order, she is even accused of forging the mail herself. In this scene, not only does Tomek demonstrate how power in the network society is about access and control over information, but the whole ordeal over the “virtual” money order captures poignantly both the hope and frustration of Poland’s entrance in a new money economy.

Next, after making contact with Magda through the mail scheme, Tomek’s game of manipulation intensifies. He breaks into a camera store and steals a high powered lens, which he uses to spy on the woman and her sexual escapades through her apartment window; he then takes on a new job, delivering milk to his neighbors, a task that allows him to greet Magda at her door each morning. He even finds her phone number and complements his surveillance practice with a series of intrusive phone calls. But perhaps the cleverest way in which Tomek controls Magda from a distance involves his use of the gas company.

When Tomek becomes jealous of one of Magda’s male guests, he decides to disrupt their lovemaking, not by personally confronting the woman, which would expose himself and his peeping; rather his disruption to her home comes about through a simple network, wherein someone acts on his behalf. This is achieved when Tomek decides to call the local gas company and report a deadly gas leak in Magda’s apartment. Of course, there is no leak, but when the gas company employees show up immediately expecting a dangerous, and potentially deadly leak, Magda’s love-making is also immediately put on hold. Feigning a potentially dangerous situation for the public, Tomek’s reliance on the gas company to alter the space of Magda’s apartment is a wonderful example of how the home cannot be articulated outside of its relationship to other outside forces and institutions.

Throughout all these strategies, Tomek shows how vulnerable the home is to an outside intrusion. But, interestingly, despite all of Tomek's crafty spying and monitoring, he is never placed in a position of sadistic power. Unlike other films, where the male voyeur torments his female victim through sadistic games of surveillance (think of that classic peeping tom, Mark Lewis, and his vicious attacks in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* or the creepy audio surveillance in *Klute*) Tomek's peeping is rather benign and no match for the sexually promiscuous Magda. Indeed, as soon as Tomek lets Magda know that he is watching, the entire power dynamic between the two changes. In short, by deciding to "stare back" Magda becomes the subject in power.

Fully aware of her peeping tom, Magda even decides to punish Tomek by fully playing up the exhibitionist role. Peering through the window seductively, she now initiates the game of surveillance, holding up her phone to encourage the young man to keep up the game. She even moves her bed in front of the window so that all of her sexual pursuits are performed in full view of Tomek. Subsequently, what was once a one way game of voyeurism has now become a two-way game, as both parties seek to control the other from a distance.

This game of peeping really takes a turn for the worse when Magda decides to initiate Tomek into the vacuous world of "true love." Believing that all Tomek really wants is physical pleasure, Magda invites him back to her place one night in order to provide him with a quick lesson in the myths of love. As a domineering and sexually experienced woman, throughout this scene Magda demonstrates her powers of face to face bodily contact: she entices him with her good looks, guides his hands over her body and even causes him to have a premature orgasm. Subsequently, before Tomek

is even able to comprehend what is happening around him, his first sexual encounter is over: “You came so quickly,” she says. “Here is your true love.” Here Magda is at her cruelest. Offering nothing by way of consolation, asking him to clean up his mess, Magda gives Tomek a firm lesson in the dangers of voyeurism, as if she were able to resolutely respond to a whole history of cinematic peeping. In short, by “looking back” Magda attempts to put an end to Tomek’s domestic intrusions, to curtail his network of spying by *containing* him in her apartment. However, her actions are unable to anticipate what will happen next. Hoping perhaps to merely shame Tomek out of his idealistic ways, to give him a firm dose of the realities of love, Magda’s cruelty goes too far. For immediately following Tomek’s sexual experiences, he storms out the apartment; and within minutes of being home commits suicide.

Tomek’s suicide ends up being a failure. After a brief stint in the hospital he returns to his banal job at the post office. What’s more, Tomek returns completely cured of his obsessive peeping. This is witnessed in the final scenes of the episode, as we are returned to the initial scene of deception and witness once again Magda and Tomek engage in an intimate conversation between the post office’s glass windows. While in that initial scene, the cinematography produced a doubling effect, as the image of the love-struck Tomek was overlaid with Magda’s image, binding the two in a shimmery virtual space, in the end scene the translucent properties of the window are used to create another visual effect, one in which Magda’s image is now marked by a gap or hole.

As Tomek confesses that he is no longer interested in peeping, we are positioned with him behind the window. All visual attention is placed on Magda’s face. However, because we are positioned directly behind the kiosk window, our

visual perspective entails looking out through the kiosks' circular hole. We do not look directly at Magda, we look at her through a gap, a process that creates a kind of circular indentation on top of her face. Subsequently, whereas in the opening scenes the image of Magda is translucent and shimmery, in the end scene her image is static and flawed, as the circular hole becomes a kind of irritant that distracts us from seeing her directly.

What should we make of this reversal – the movement from a virtual space of overlapping simultaneity to the figure of a gap or hole? A more standard reading of this change, I think, would envision the cessation of Tomek's peeping tom antics as a lesson in the Lacanian register of "the Real." That is, whereas the opening scene was defined in terms of the virtual, where Magda comes to represent for Tomek an ideal image of desire, that necessary "Other" that fills in the subject's irreplaceable loss and uncertainty, the end scene's emphasis on gaps or holes represents the failure of this ideal. Thus, while Magda is in the beginning Tomek's pathway to the feeling and experience of home, a maternal space of plentitude, in the end this space of jouissance is shown to be an illusion.

While this standard reading of voyeurism is somewhat applicable, I would like to suggest another interpretation of the gendered relationship between Tomek and Magda. First of all, there is some truth to the idea that Tomek is desperately in search of a home. After all, Tomek is an orphan, who has never had a stable home life. Indeed, as someone who is renting a room in his friend's family house, Tomek appears to be in need of some homely completeness. Yet, instead of seeing Tomek's status as an orphan as a kind of irreconcilable experience of loss, Tomek's homelessness can be taken as a sign of hope, a sign of his freedom from the confines of the traditional

family. When Magda asks him about his life in an orphanage, for example, Tomek's reply does not involve any of those traditional sentiments of pity or regret; rather Tomek enjoyed it immensely, since his break from the standard family home brought him into contact with a host of different cultures and languages. This experience with difference even prompted his passionate love of learning different languages.

If the home is a sign of the nation, could we not read Tomek's homelessness as the desire to part ways with the narrowness of Polish identity and embrace other forms of dwelling? This might explain his attraction to Magda. As an assertive and sexually liberated woman, Magda clearly represents a new kind of femininity, one which is not tied to any of those traditional domestic duties. As such, Tomek's interest in Magda may not be at all about the subjugation of the female other or the reduction of Magda to a visual object; his interest is, I think, about expanding his horizons and the hopeful possibilities that come about by rejecting normative gender roles and the ideal family life.

A final way in which the gender divide in the episode can be understood outside the standard reading of the masculine voyeur has to do with the issue of "access," namely who has access to the networks of control. After all, the episode does not just feature a one-sided game of surveillance, but Magda too uses a range of strategies to peep in on the private life of her peeping tom. This is seen near the end of the episode, when Magda experiences guilt over Tomek's suicide and desperately tries to find out information about his whereabouts, his health and when he will be released from the hospital.

Interestingly, while Tomek seems to have no trouble interfering with Magda's life, having access to her address, phone number, mail, and private life, Magda it seems

is unable to breach Tomek's private life, unable to decisively gain access to any details regarding his home. Subsequently, throughout the latter parts of the episode Magda's social standing changes from a figure of authority to someone living in a state of uncertainty, as she possesses very little data about Tomek's condition. Indeed, while Magda is able to command the face-to-face encounter and is a kind of master of bodily contact, she is not very proficient at commanding and controlling flows of information. In short, unlike Tomek, who commands a network of strategies that provide him with a very detailed map of Magda's home life, Magda is not able to return the favor. When she suspects something terrible has happened to Tomek, for example, her only recourse is the register of sight, as she stands in front of the window holding a placard, asking Tomek to call. Then when he doesn't call she physically goes to his apartment and asks his landlady what has happened. Other than these two outlets, Magda's appears to have no other way of finding out about Tomek's life. Thus, instead of mapping the gender divide in terms of the traditional concepts of subject and object or seer and seen, I think that the episode raises the point that in the new world of the control societies, power and inequalities needs to be understood in terms of access: access to information, resources and spaces that determine one's position within the network.

Episode 10: Guarding the Home at all Costs

Unlike the somber and still opening of episode 1, episode 10 begins in a state of frenzied mayhem. As the scene opens we are taken inside a raucous punk concert, where an ecstatic young man shouts a plethora of harsh and demoralizing sentiments: "Kill. Kill. Kill. Commit adultery, covet things all the week...beat up your mother, your father, your sister... beat up the young one ...and steal everything because everything

belongs to you, everything belongs to you.” On the verge of Poland’s shift to a free market economy, the young man’s rage pronounces in advance the decline of western civilization, as greed and corruption destroy any sense of family values. Thus, if the series began on a somber note, where the loss of young Pawel, signaled the home’s inability to offer protection from the outside, it will appear that we will end our journey through an anarchist hell, as the family home is not simply on the decline; it will be actively destroyed.

Oddly, despite this opening evocation of the chaos of absolute egotism and individual greed, in this final episode what we actually witness is the forging of familial bonds, the creation of a family rather than its rejection, as two brothers come to bond over the death of their father. This odd mixture of anarchy and familial bonding is captured immediately in the opening scene: as a rather normal looking businessman is seen signaling to someone in the concert, the camera flashes back and forth to the ecstatic singer and his vengeful rage. A little later we learn that the man is actually the punk rocker’s brother, who has ventured out into his brother’s mayhem in order to tell him that their father has just died. Thus, while on one hand, the punk concert signals the destruction of the family, and the greed and corruption of a consumer society, on the other hand, the businessman’s desire to contact his long lost brother signals how it is still possible to make some kind of domestic bond. Indeed, if we take this reconciliation to signify the reuniting of Poland with its pre-socialist past, the contradictory brotherly love witnessed in the beginning may point to how the future may hold the promise of an alternative mode of dwelling.

Again, just as the series evokes at times both the hope of a new nationalistic future and the uncertainty about entering a new world order, the final episode

performs a delicate balancing act between the extremes of destruction and restoration. For while the brothers enjoy a certain degree of familial bonding, it is their reunion that ultimately leads them down a slippery slope of surveillance, envy, greed, suspicion and betrayal. And like all other episodes, this path towards the decline of the family has everything to do with the life of the apartment building. Indeed, in episode 10, the unruly presence of the building is not merely metaphorical; it is the very cause of their self-destruction, as the two brothers seek to defend the interiority of the apartment at all costs.

As the viewer comes to learn, when the two brothers travel to their father's home in order to get his remains in order, they are confronted with an enigma: while the father lived in a desolate apartment and possessed only the most minimalistic amount of personal possessions, the brothers discover that the apartment is protected by a sophisticated surveillance system: not only has the father installed a steel-plated door, an alarm and several locks (the number is 7 to be precise) but he even had all the windows nailed shut. For the brothers the apartment's excessive insularity is inexplicable. "What could all this protection be for," the young brother Artur inquires. Moments after his inquiry, however, they get their answer, as they discover an extensive stamp collection that, according to the brothers, might be worth 300, 000 to 400, 000 zlotys.

While the brothers are right about the fact that stamps today are quite expensive, they have no idea just how valuable their father's collection is. For instead of the stamps being valued at a mere 300, 000 zlotys, the stamps are actually worth tens of millions in the western market. As an appraiser looks over the stamps, he underscores the fact that the brothers' are about to start new life of material bliss, as

all their needs and desires will now be met. “For this one you can buy a small Fiat. For these, two diesels. This series will pay for your flat.”

For the brothers the discovery of their father’s wealth is bittersweet. On one hand, the father’s obsession with collecting reminds them of their terrible upbringing, the lack of food, and terrible living conditions the family had to endure. On the other hand, the stamp collection becomes a shared project, an inheritance that enables the brothers to rekindle their distant relationship. Now, as the joint owners of a fortune, the two brothers have something in common. But, while the brothers cherish a new life of familial bonding, this will not be a gift that comes without a cruel barter. As the saying goes, you can’t get something for nothing, and what the brothers inherit is a heavy dose of their father’s paranoia and suspicion. Now that they are the owners of something worthy, now that they have become in possession of a fortune, the brothers become entranced with the question of how to best protect this fortune. And as with the father, the answer is to barricade the home. Using their father’s apartment as a safety zone, the brothers even enhance the apartment’s already sophisticated security system by adding steel bars to the windows and a guard dog.

Unlike episode 6, where the demarcation between the private spaces of Tomek and Magda is blurred, in the final episode, the home is depicted as a rigid no-man’s land, an island of defense that is designed to keep everyone out. No doubt this defense of the home resonated at the national level, as many feared what would happen when Poland prepared to leave the insular world of Communism and join a free market economy. Indeed, if we take the brother’s relationship to stand in for the state of the nation, what is discovered in this final episode is not only a paranoid fear

of outsiders, but a world where “possessing things” is destined to destroy the institution of the family.

This destruction of the home is particularly agonizing when the viewer learns that the gift left by the father causes the brothers to turn on each other, as each brother suspects the other of wanting more than his share of the wealth. When the apartment is robbed, for example, Jerzy immediately suspect his brother of the crime. He even meets with a police officer and insists that Artur is a prime suspect. Meanwhile Artur is also perplexed by the robbery and also turns his suspicions towards his brother, pulling the same cop routine and requesting that Jerzy be considered one of the main suspects. By now any of the charming inter-brother relationship that had been fostered up until this point has completely vanished. The father-figure’s obsession with collecting, which had destroyed the family, has now infected the two brothers, as the early anarchist anthem of killing off the family has come all too true.

As it turns out, neither of the brothers were responsible for the robbery. Rather the brothers were the victims of a seedy stamp dealer. In the end, the robbery demonstrates that no apartment is an island; no level of protection is enough to seal off the interiority of the home from an unwanted intrusion. For the brothers this belief in the impenetrability of the home is their downfall; having witnessed the isolation of their father, who sacrificed his entire family over a silly obsession, the brothers too betray their bonds by becoming the very greedy, egotists portrayed in the opening punk song.

Of all the episodes in *The Decalogue* it is episode 10 which provides the most direct image of the home as the unstable nation, a territory which must be heavily

guarded in order to prevent the dissolution and loss of its internal identity. Indeed, like the French film *Summer Hours*, where the sale of the home of a cherished national painter and all his belongings creates a metaphorical panic over the loss of French culture and identity, the father's precious stamp collection can also be read as the integrity and loss of the nation's legacy. But, for the brothers, whose enthusiasm turns to greed, this facet of the stamps - that they are a record of the past and a means of remaining in contact with previous generations - is completely lost on them. Pointed towards the future and the luxurious items that they will fetch on the open market, the only value the stamps possess is monetary. In this way, the sale of the father's collection signals the uncertain shift towards the values of capitalism and all its myths of greed, egotism and hyper individualism.

If it weren't for the last few minutes of the episode, one might be led to believe that episode 10 forms the definitive allegory of mistrust and anxiety, a tale of woe signaling what is about to happen to a nation state as it opens its borders up to the maelstrom of western capitalism. But this is not the case. Rather, in the dying minutes of the story we see the brothers overcome their misdeeds and once again rekindle their relationship. After meeting by chance on the street, both brothers finally piece together the mystery of the robbery and admit their foolishness over becoming obsessed with the stamps. However, what's most interesting is that instead of being turned off from the act of collecting, both brothers decide to start their own stamp collections from scratch, as both men can be seen buying the same new stamps in separate post offices. Thus despite their difficult and frayed reunion the brothers seem to avoid the opening demands to kill of the family unit and instead find in their troubled ways a new path of discovery. In an episode that seems to signal most

forcibly the total decline of the family this perhaps is also the series' most hopeful scene. Departing from the past, abandoning the flaws and folly of previous generations, the two brothers set out with their eyes on what they hope is a promising future.

Conclusion

If the home is the nation's extended family, a metaphor for the longing for communal fortitude, what happens when the hearth is attacked from all sides? What happens when the home's protective barriers suddenly become porous? Through its extensive portrayal of domestic woe and the tragic decline of the family, *The Decalogue* captures poignantly a nation at a dramatic crossroads: with one side facing the past and the other facing the future, the apartment complex is quite simply the series' most important sign, an architectural presence that takes the viewer not only through the legacy and decline of Poland's socialistic past; but the building marks the anxiety and hope for what may or may not come in the future.

As we have seen from the episodes explored above, *The Decalogue's* spatial politics coalesces around the problem of maintaining boundaries and borders. Much like the nation, which depends on upholding certain linguistic, legalistic and political borders, the home requires its own protective borders, its own modes of containment. Yet, for the characters in the series, this protection lays in tatters, as the demarcation between inside and outside, between what is public and private constantly shifts sides, blurring the rigidity of the home's interiority. And, as we have seen, quite often this shift in space is experienced as immense dread. For Tomek it entails a near-fatalistic encounter with the sensuous Magda, a desire for an alternative mode of dwelling that

turned nasty and cruel; and for the two brothers it results in a bitter rivalry that not only claimed one of Jerzy's kidney but put an immense strain on their home life.

But despite the series journey through the pain and suffering of being unable to control one's environment, and while the show shows the failure of grand ideological projects, there are moments of hope. The past may be a site of failure, but the future may hold clues to alternative modes of living: can't we see Tomek's peeping as a desire to reach out and forge a new connection with a woman, who has clearly abandoned traditional domestic roles; and despite the brother's entanglement with greed, do they not start out near the end towards a new future.

Chapter 3

The Future is Behind You: The Reclamation of Place in Michel Gondry's *Be Kind Rewind*

Nostalgia, Technology and the Home

During the first season finale of AMC's hit television series, *Mad Men*, Don Draper, the show's uber-creative adman, makes a poignant and deeply personal pitch to Kodak on the domestic benefits of their latest invention, The Kodak Wheel - a simple circular device that allows photographic enthusiasts to seamlessly organize and showcase their photographic slides. For the men at Kodak, the Wheel represents something of an advertising nightmare. Containing none of the "technological flash" or "enticing novelty" that attracts most consumers, the archaic nature of the wheel raises the important question of how to sell a product that appears to have been around forever.

Beginning his speech with a disclaimer that sounds like something out of Henry Jenkins' (2006) book on the new affective economy, where the goal of advertising is to build brand loyalty through emotional attachments,¹⁰ Draper insists that the Wheel's dependence on an old technology is irrelevant. Advertising, Draper claims, is undeniably predicated on the lure of the new. Yet, this is only one side of

¹⁰ In his chapter "Buying into American Idol," Jenkins discusses reality TV's affective appeal to audiences and consumers. According to Jenkins the affective economy represents a new phase in advertising, wherein qualitative relationships with consumers become just as important as quantitative ones. This leads to new advertising practices where sentiments, emotions and interactive engagement become vital ways in which companies lure in consumers. In the case of reality TV, the affective consumer is not a passive agent in the consumer process, but an active agent that helps shape the form and content of the products consumed.

advertising's arsenal of seduction. On the other side, advertising works to create deeper bonds with the emotional life of the consumer, to attach to the consumer's feelings of homely comfort and warmth. Yes, the wheel may be an old technology, but framed in a particular way, the old can easily become seductive, especially by spurring on the desire to go back in time, to emotionally reconnect with some long lost memory.

To dramatize his point Draper himself takes a trip down memory lane. First he recounts an invaluable lesson in advertising imparted to him by his mentor, "an old Greek pro named Teddy." According to Teddy, a successful ad can at times use the past as a way of drawing in the consumer. This is where nostalgia comes in. According to Teddy, the word nostalgia is derived from Greek and involves the painful ache to return to the past; nostalgia is more than memory, more than recounting the past, it is about the heart's desire to return to a special place in the past. While Teddy understands nostalgia as a general "longing to return," Draper insists that this desire depends on returning to a very specific place: the desire to return is really the desire to go home, to return to a place of origins.

Relating this lesson in time-travel to the Kodak Wheel, Draper then claims that the appeal of the wheel can be found in its status as a kind of domestic time-machine. As he boasts confidently, the Kodak Wheel is not really a wheel; it is a Carousel, a child's toy that, like the slides on the projector, goes around and around indefinitely, gliding back and forth between different layers of time. To illustrate, Draper's quest down memory lane takes a decidedly personal turn. Demonstrating the Carousel in action, Draper proceeds to showcase a series of slides that feature some of his most important family moments – his wedding day, Christmas celebrations, birthday

parties and other trips with his family – to drive home his point: the Kodak Wheel is no ordinary invention; it is not a device that simply organizes and projects photographic slides; it is a way to reconnect with a certain place where one was loved and appreciated. In other words, no matter where you are located, no matter how bad your present situation may be, you are only ever a few clicks away from returning to the comforts of home.

In this chapter I will consider how Draper's perspective on the Kodak Carousel, especially his insistent plea that media technologies are about nostalgia and the desire to return to the suburban home, is explored and critiqued in Michel Gondry's film *Be Kind Rewind*. In doing so I wish to challenge some of the ways in which this 'return home' is framed. First of all, instead of dwelling on the spaces of the suburbs, I will show how the spaces of the city can be read as a "collective home," that is more open and public in character. That is, instead of considering the home as a private experience, I will look at how the urban environment can be seen as the ground for collective modes of dwelling.

This will be evidenced in the way that the film explores a derelict neighborhood in Passaic, New Jersey and the new kinds of collective living that are fostered through the co-joining of architecture and media practices. Specifically, I will look at how the narrative explores architectural memory, especially the ways in which the neighborhood is brought together through an old decrepit building that one of the character's claims is the former birthplace of Jazz legend Fats Waller. Thus, instead of envisioning the retrieval of the past in terms of an insular family album of eternal moments, the film asks us to consider how memory, especially architectural memory, belongs to a much larger public sphere.

Second, while architecture may be seen as the most durable of art forms, made of material structures that impede the passage of time, in Gondry's film architecture will be depicted as precarious structures that relate to different modes of time. On one hand, the erasure of architectural forms represents a total threat to collective memories, as the destruction of key buildings may disrupt the way people remember their past. On the other hand, the films shows how when architecture converges with other media practices, like analog video, the past can be read as an open archive, a permeable structure, which can be used to creatively retell stories of the past. Indeed, by deliberately concocting their own unofficial story of Jazz legend Fats Waller through a documentary film, the neighborhood insists that sometimes what matters most is not the content of the story but how the act of storytelling can forge new identities in the present. In this way, the production of an alternative history of jazz music is treated as a mode of fabulation in which the past is deliberately revised in order to create new social relationships and urban collectives.

Finally, as a film that locates new modes of dwelling in the forgotten and derelict parts of the city, I will argue that *Be Kind Rewind* offers a pertinent discourse on the problems of waste and obsolescence. As we will see, by using old analog video rather than the new digital format to create their collective documentaries, the narrative's amateur film collective explores how old media practices can be recycled in the present. In short, by resurrecting an outdated media format, the film collective invites the viewer to consider alternative ideas about how to best deal with the "junk spaces" of the contemporary media landscape.

Perusing the critical reviews of Michel Gondry's film *Be Kind Rewind*, I was surprised to find several references to Frank Capra's holiday classic *It's A Wonderful Life*.¹¹ Given Gondry's status as one of Hollywood's most idiosyncratic directors, whose previous work with such iconic eccentrics as Bjork and Beck has secured him a prolific career centered on exposing the absurdity of life, the comparisons to Capra's wholesome slice of Americana seems strange. What could Gondry's bizarre, implausible story of two goofballs (Mos Def and Jack Black), who try to save a local video store from gentrification by creating their own weird, low budget versions of popular films (a process known in the film as "sweding") have to do with the existential crisis of the straight-laced George Bailey?

The answer, it seems, has everything to do with the immense nostalgia witnessed in both films' concluding scenes. In Capra's classic ending, the suicidal George Bailey is stitched back into the community when he realizes that, without him, the small town of Bedford Falls would have been sucked into the abyss of urbanization. Indeed, as Bailey comes to realize, without his firm leadership and dedication, the beautiful civic town of Bedford Falls would cease to exist. Instead, in Bailey's alternate universe, Bedford Falls is replaced by its direct opposite, Pottersville, a decrepit city that is filled with pawn shops and sleazy bars. Capra's contrast could not be starker: from the collective might of a pristine American town to a city strangled by social anomie, Capra's tale is as much about the rapid process of modern urbanization as it is about the moral fate of a troubled individual. In fact, for Capra, the two are ineluctably linked: transformed by his glimpse into urban darkness, George

¹¹ See, for example, Emanuel Levy's review of *Be Kind Rewind*, Sarah Michelle Fetter's "Odd Be Kind, Rewind Stuck in Neutral," and Philip Horne's review "Be Kind, Rewind to Past Masters."

Bailey finally realizes the value of the public good and, in a final act of collective action, Bedford Falls is saved.¹²

At the end of *Be Kind Rewind* we are also asked to ponder the viability of collective action. While this time the culminating moment of civic pride involves the film's two bumbling idiots, who slowly bring together an inner city neighborhood by including the locals in their "amateur" film productions, the end result is no less moving or nostalgic. Like the viewers of Capra's tale, who watch a group of charitable neighbors band together to bail out their leader and save the town from corporate greed, Gondry's audience is also offered a touching scene in which the public takes to the streets in order to support the local filmmakers and possibly save the video store from demolition. Here in a final image of a cheering, jubilant crowd Gondry pays homage to collective action at its most nostalgic. Publicly united, firmly implanted in the streets, Gondry's crowd seems destined to succeed: the store will be saved.

The similarities, however, do not end here. Just as Capra's image of the good life centers on saving an important local institution (Bailey's bank is the town's saving grace) in *Be Kind Rewind* the emotional sentiment evidenced at the end of the film also surrounds the ways in which collectivities attempt to reclaim important architectural landmarks. As we learn in the beginning, *Be Kind Rewind* refers to an antiquated video store/thrift shop that also serves as the home of Mr. Fletcher and the orphaned Mike. However, despite the building's unofficial status as a historic landmark (Fletcher claims that the building was the birthplace of Jazz legend Fats Waller) the city has declared it a tenement and plans to destroy the building in thirty days. As in Capra's story, in which the town has a short period of time to come up with the money to save

¹² For a more sustained exploration of the contrast between cities and rural life in Capra's work see Robin Woods' essay "Ideology, Genre, Auteur (1976)."

the bank, in *Be Kind Rewind* the city's time limit also forms the central narrative line, as Fletcher must race against the clock in order to save his home and business. To do so, Fletcher takes a leave of absence and travels to other parts of the city, conducting "media" research on the latest trends in the video rental business.

Meanwhile, left in charge of the store, Mike is forced to deal with his friend Jerry, the resident nut-case, who constantly disrupts the order of things through a range of strange antics, like his adamant belief that the local power plant is sending out "manipulative messages" that are controlling the minds of the community. As expected, Jerry's trouble making is no match for Mike and through a bizarre incident that leaves him "magnetized," Jerry proceeds to erase all the store's video rentals. Luckily for Mike and Jerry this act of erasure turns out to be a miracle in disguise. Believing that they can remake the films using an old analog camera and some make-shift props and special effects, the amateur filmmakers end up striking a chord with the locals, who flock to the store in hope of watching their local neighborhood transformed into the cinematic spaces of such Hollywood classics as *Ghostbusters*, *The Lion King* and *Rush Hour 2*. Jerry and Mike even begin allowing the locals to appear in the films, creating an overnight boom in business, as the store is transformed from a blight on the neighborhood to a trendy hub gleaming with hype and creativity.

Yet, despite all this nostalgic stuff about the revival of the public sphere, in the end this will be no Capra film. As soon as the film approaches its happy culmination, a legal team representing several greedy Hollywood conglomerates appear out of nowhere, crushing all hope of saving the building. Since the protagonists' lucrative "home-made" movie industry is in violation of numerous copyright laws the men have no choice but to terminate the business. The building will be destroyed. Thus, while

Gondry's begins his story with an affirmative image of what collective action might look like, in the end local determination is seen as no match for a system of copyright law that undermines public access and creativity in the name of profit and private property.

So, it turns out that Gondry's oddball film does indeed resonate with Capra's holiday classic. But despite these similarities we must be careful not to elide some of the dramatic differences between both films. This is where the issue of home comes in. Whereas Capra's tale is set squarely within a nostalgic framework, wherein the all-American small town is pitted against the demoralizing, noir-like features of urbanization, for Gondry it is the city itself, especially certain urban spaces (namely Fletcher's decrepit apartment building) that act as hubs for collective encounters and forms the backbone of the public good. Thus, while the spirit of these two films may be similar, their contrasting spatial environments tell different stories about which location - city or town - is best suited to achieving a strong public sphere.

It is this territorial question of how different urban spaces foster alternative notions of the public good that I feel is crucial to understanding the counter-hegemonic concerns of Gondry's film. While many will undoubtedly find Gondry's critique of mainstream cinema the most pressing concern of *Be Kind Rewind*, wherein the protagonists' low-fi, creative re-makes mirror Gondry's own filmic experimentation, this critique I believe needs to be placed in context. As a highly spatial medium, the cinema not only possesses the ability to express the nuances of specific locations - from a city's erosion into physical degradation to the preservation of certain architectural icons, but, as James Hay writes, specific territorial environments are equally needed to understand the cinema. As Hays writes:

What is necessary, I would argue, is a way of discussing film as a social practice that begins by considering how social relations are spatially organized - through sites of production and consumption - and how film is practiced from and across particular sites and always in relation to other sites. In this respect, cinema is not seen in a dichotomous relation with the social, but as dispersed within an environment of sites that defines (in spatial terms) the meanings, uses, and place of "the cinematic." The cinema is a place distinct from other sites but, in its relation to these other sites, part of the formation of a territory which it works to map (2007:216).

Viewed in terms of Hays' spatial theory of film, in order to explore what Gondry is doing in terms of filmic experimentation we need to understand how the figure of home is represented in the film and how an encounter with the (un)homely leads to different experiences of the city and media practices. In order to unpack the significance of this question of territorialities, I will proceed by exploring a series of disruptions that occur to the Fletcher residence/store and the various spatial and mediatory outcomes that arise out of this process of (un)homely destabilization. More precisely, I argue that the changing status of the store/home (the home moves from being considered a blight on the neighborhood, a hub of local creativity, a site of copyright infringement to ultimately being destroyed) provides a series of apt metaphors for the way global urban strategies are experienced and worked out at the local level. Three main thematic areas will be explored in relation to this disruption of the home: the first involves the issue of space and the process of global gentrification; the second theme involve Gondry's sustained discourse on the issue of old and new technologies and how antiquated technologies still offer viable ways of experimenting with film; and in the third, the issue of memory will be tied to media technologies, particularly the way past histories and stories can be retold through the act of collective fabulation.

In his article “The New World System,” Joshua Clover asks the simple but strange question: “Where is China?” The question is strange, since it is not one that is designed to be answered from a purely geographic point of view. Rather, Clover’s question is directed at the imaginary spaces of the cinema, especially its inability to map the cultural and political complexities found in today’s multinational, global environments. As such, the question “Where is China?” becomes a rhetorical device pointing to the impossibility of the task: Where is China exactly? It is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Specifically, Clover’s question is directed at contemporary Chinese cinema and the unfortunate decline of important poetic visionaries like Wong Kar-wai and Hou Hsiao-hsien. Whereas, for Clover, directors like Kar-wai were able to create vivid and nuanced images of life in cities, like Hong Kong, the current trend involves the creation of various watered-down representations of generic, global cities. This can be found, for example, in Kar-wai’s first English film *My Blueberry Nights*, a movie where the intensity, cultural tension and up-rootedness typical of a Kong drama is transposed into a generic, romantic road movie lacking in any definable features. Thus, according to Clover, in place of specificity and uniqueness we are witnessing the birth of the filmic non-place, generic films that rely on a litany of interchangeable international destinations that all look like each other.

While Clover makes some important insights about the cinema’s oversimplified images of global societies, what is most interesting about the article occurs when he makes the odd observation that the most acute depiction of contemporary China comes, not from local film directors, but is found in the

industrial decay of Passaic, New Jersey. The reference is to Gondry's *Be Kind Rewind*, which Clover argues offers a fantasy scene of China at its most complex: "This is the China of our dreams: half cheap, fast, and out-of-control hyper-capitalist production zone...Here comes China" (2008:3).

Exactly what Clover means by this unexpected observation is not entirely clear. Sure, the film's reference to the problem of copyright infringement can be taken as a loose reference to Hollywood's attempt to curb the problem of piracy in areas like China. We could also understand the comparison in terms of what Frederic Jameson (1992) calls mapping the geo-political aesthetic. In his book *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Jameson analyzes a range of narratives that all deal with the problem of representing the postmodern world. In short, for Jameson, the task of representing or mapping the world system proves untenable. Since the world system represents a complicated geo-political system that cannot be grasped by the subject's cognitive faculties, quite often the spatial boundaries between here and there, between first and third worlds, collapse into a nomadic zone of indeterminacy. Read in this way, the idea of Passaic, China would represent the way local places are always inexplicably tied to an elusive global elsewhere.

Neither of these approaches really gets at the issue of place explored in the film. In fact, I would argue that instead of trying to understand Gondry's representation of space in terms of a complex web of elusive networks or a global "elsewhere," we should take Gondry's representation of Passaic at face value. That is, the global processes explored in the film can be examined best by narrowing in on the local, especially the effects large scale processes have on specific locations within the city. This is not to say that the local is not a site free of global interconnections or that

we should always trust appearances; rather I am interested in how these global processes impact local architecture and urban collectives, how the global is felt from within.

The Status of the Home: Global Gentrification and the Erasure of the Past

In the next few sections I will narrow in on the central way the film looks at the relationship between global and local processes by examining what Neil Smith calls the new face of gentrification.¹³ Before doing this, though, I will make a few comments on the status of the home in the film. Unlike other films I analyze, where the materiality of the home centers around the private spaces of the domestic interior, in *Be Kind Rewind* the distinction between public and private space is openly rejected. As the family residence of Mr. Fletcher and Mike, the building clearly belongs to the “family sphere” and conjures up associations with domesticity, privacy, coziness and private property. Yet, as a commercial building that provides a video rental service to the public, the building also belongs to the public sphere. Indeed, throughout the film, we are rarely presented with any exclusive interior shots of the residence, but what is emphasized is the commercial and collective ambience of the shop, as customers, friends and acquaintances use the store as kind of collective hub.

¹³ In this chapter the topic of gentrification will be explored primarily through the works of Neil Smith. According to Smith, the old idea of gentrification is no longer applicable to contemporary societies; rather beginning in the 1970s a new phase of gentrification has emerged around the idea of globalization. For example, in “The Changing State of Gentrification” Smith and Hackworth look at how state intervention has been instrumental to the alteration of old urban neighborhoods; here the process of gentrification is not simply a condition of individual capitalists, but the federal government has been instrumental to initiating large redevelopment projects. In “Gentrification Generalized, From Local Anomaly to Urban “Regeneration” as Global Urban Strategy,” Smith refers to this new phase of gentrification as a “urban renaissance,” a process whereby the scale and language of gentrification has changed, becoming a kind a buzz word for various urban redevelopment plans and initiatives. See also Smith and DeFilippis “The Reassertion of Economics: 1990s Gentrification in the Lower East Side” and Smith’s “Homeless/Global: Scaling Places.”

Of course, some might argue that commercial spaces can ever truly belong to the public sphere, since by definition public space is open to everyone irrespective of their desire or ability to purchase a product or service. This is an important objection. As many critics, such as Richard Sennett (1977), Jurgen Habermas (1991), Michael Sorkin (1992) and Setha Low (2000, have shown, in western societies the public sphere has come under serious attack, as it becomes more and more difficult to separate public spaces from the intrusive realities of commerce and the principles of the marketplace. But does the trend towards a rapidly declining public sphere mean that all collective institutions have been eradicated? In many contemporary cities, for example, there seems to be no shortage of places where groups may congregate, no shortage of large public gatherings that emphasize the “ritualistic and communal” aspect of social life (think, for example, of the rise in large sports stadiums, concerts, and other media events that bring together large groups of people). While many of these places are clearly commercialized, and belong to a social world where privatized institutions have come to replace the civic functions of places like public parks or old town squares, can they still function as viable public and collective spaces?

For many critics, like Setha Low, since our collective spaces are increasingly governed by private enterprises, whose sole purpose is securing profitability, the instrumental question becomes how the private and capitalistic quality of collective spaces has altered the democratic and egalitarian principles traditionally associated with the public sphere. Describing how the private-oriented approaches to North American collective spaces mean that such spaces lack the vibrancy of public places found in other places, Low writes:

There are observable differences between central urban plazas in Latin America or Europe that retain a vibrant public life and civic spaces of Los Angeles and New

York. Unless North American urban spaces become commercially successful - the best examples being New York City's South Street Seaport, Boston's Faneuil Hall Marketplace, San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square and the Cannery, or Baltimore's Harborplace or public/private models of center-city development such as Bryant Park or Battery Park City - their future remains in question. Commercialization and privatization, however, limit participation to those who can afford it and who conform to middle-class rules of conduct and appearance (2000:35).

Low and other critics of the privatization of public space raise some interesting questions about how profit incentives and commercial success dramatically alter the basic tenets we associate with public spaces. In his book *The Celebration Chronicles: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Property Value*, Andrew Ross describes how the impulse towards the privatization of space can even drastically affect how we understand civic places, like entire municipalities. In the book Ross describes his stay in the Disney owned town of Celebration, a kind of gated community in Florida that has been designed to look like one of those old, nostalgic all-American small towns. According to Ross, while the town's ownership by Disney hasn't eliminated many of the civic problems associated with other municipalities, (the town's people still fight over education reform, quality of life and amenities) the fact that the entire town is heavily managed by a single private enterprise raises serious questions about the viability of the public sphere and ultimately what kind of power residents have over their homes and collective spaces.

But, while it is true that serious legal and cultural challenges are encountered with privatized spaces, the simple reduction of all commercial spaces to a "compromised public sphere, where legal frameworks discourage and prevent access to certain consumers," needs to be put in perspective. In *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film*, for example, Miriam Hansen critiques Habermas' notion of the public sphere by addressing how the early film spectator could be seen

not only as the precursor to the modern mass consumer, but as members of an alternative public sphere. For Miriam this alternative public sphere, however, has nothing to do with Habermas' classical formulation. The public sphere does not belong solely to the educated bourgeoisie, nor is there even a singular public sphere that can be neatly separated from private spaces. If anything, the alternative public spheres that emerge through cinematic institutions, such as the early Nickel theaters, represent hybrid spaces, where commercial interest in creating a mass, international cultural movement actually helped create a new series of liberating social spaces. Thus, in the case of early cinema, the commercial incentive of the Nickelodeons did not, at least in the beginning, challenge the “public” dimension of the cinema. In fact, for the working classes and recent immigrants, groups that were not readily welcomed into the city’s official public spaces, the cinema represented an alternate public sphere, where issues of exclusion and class solidarity could be addressed.

In *Be Kind Rewind* the collective and commercial nature of the shop belongs more to Hansen’s model of public inclusion than Low’s model of restricted access. This is strongly evidenced in the opening scene, where we find the heroes of the story, Jerry and Mike, painting graffiti on a large public wall. Just as early film co-joined commercial interests with the creation of an alternative public sphere, in this scene two different sets of images are used to merge two kinds of discourses: the first set of images involves a massive portrait of Fats Waller (historical discourse); the second image is a huge commercial tag of the store name *Be Kind Rewind* (private interests). While, at first, both images seem unrelated, we quickly learn that the commercial tag and the portrait are deeply intertwined: since Fats was supposedly born in Fletcher’s shop, the portrait refers to the store and vice versa the shop refers

back to Fats cultural legacy. Subsequently, while the images maintain an explicit commercial quality, at no point does the graffiti trump the characteristics of the public sphere. Rather, for Mike, the desecration of public property to promote his store is necessary since it maintains a pedagogical function: since Fats belongs to the cultural history of Passaic, people need to be reminded of who he was and what he means to the vitality of the neighborhood.

Disruption 1

The first disruption to the Fletcher home occurs immediately and its effect on the building's place within the neighborhood is stark, definitive: in short, because the city has declared the building a public health risk, Fletcher's home is deemed unlivable and will be destroyed to make way for a new condominium project. What is a historic gem to Mike - a home that provides direct access to the cultural legacy of the past - is to the city officials a (un)homely pile of rubbish, an old, decrepit and dangerous building that, like the past, must be overcome in order to make way for the future. But what is interesting about the status of Fletcher's home is the way its "necessary destruction" is viewed by the city officials as a matter of individual responsibility; since Fletcher has not been able to keep his building up to code, they have no choice but to eradicate it from the urban fabric. Nowhere in these pronouncements do we encounter Low's observation that in order for a place to become viable it needs to be commercially successful. Instead the larger geo-political issues of how spaces are increasingly colonized by private enterprises are concealed by recourse to the issue of beautification: since the building is old and run down, its worth is reduced to a matter of aesthetics and, most importantly, how this public eye-sore can be removed.

In short, the first disruption to the home resonates well with what Sharon Zukin (1991) calls the “battle over the right to the city.” Since, for Zukin, the cultural life of cities is instrumental to the economic sustainability of urban governments, which use cultural institutions to attract global investments and tourist dollars, culture can at times play a rather sinister role in restructuring urban space. This can be witnessed in the way many city centers have been “re-branded” to include purified and aseptic zones of consumptions that cater to the ideal consumer’s desire for danger-free spaces to consume new products and experiences. For Zukin, these rebranding strategies represent real battle grounds, fights over access to the city, where many local collectives attempt to win back parts of the city consumed by large corporations.

In the remaining part of this section I will look at how this “battle over the right to the city” relates to the changing dynamics of gentrification. Specifically, relying on the work of Neil Smith, I will argue that the eradication of Fletcher’s building belongs to a systemic process, whereby the erasure of older parts of the city and the rebranding of space in terms of the progress of the “new” belongs, not just to particular urban areas, like London and New York (objects of gentrification in the past). Rather, even marginal places like Passaic, New Jersey, will be shown to come under the purvey of a global process that seeks the new over the old, the commercially successful over the public good, and profit over creativity.

Just as Gondry uses a cultural rivalry between New Jersey and New York to explore the way local places are impacted by systemic, global processes (according to Fletcher the real site of America’s jazz revolution was Passaic, New Jersey rather than Harlem, New York), in his article “New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy,” Neil Smith references both places in order to illustrate the

way geographic environments are positioned and structured within globalization. Specifically, Neil relays a controversial story involving a supposed “Christmas gift” Mayor Giuliani offered to New Yorkers in 1998. The gift, which involved a \$900 million tax subsidy that would allow the New York Stock Exchange to stay in New York, illustrated quite succinctly the fierce inter-regional competition required of cities to stay ahead and compete in a global game of international investment and capital (427, 428). Several months earlier the Stock Exchange had threatened to relocate to New Jersey, where it would receive a much more lucrative tax package from the local government. Overnight, it seemed, the NYSE was prepared to abandon its long and colorful history in New York, a place synonymous with the birth of American economic might, by relocating to a much more peripheral place promising a sounder environment for competing in the global economy.

While the NYSE’s threat captures the way cities must constantly duke it out in order to ensure that their urban centers offer the most lucrative places for global investments, the real issue for Smith is not simply the content of the threat but how the city of New York choose to respond to this act of defiance. Using the seductive language of the gift economy, Mayor Giuliani’s claim that the act of saving the NYSE was a gift to the people of New York illustrates, according to Smith, how issues of the public good are consistently used in the service of the global economy. Of course Smith’s point is not that economic factors are unimportant to the good life or that New Yorkers shouldn’t be happy that they were able to retain an important historical institution; rather the issue is the way the public is consistently used as a play-toy for advancing the agendas of corporate enterprises, corporations that are not legally or politically bound to ensuring the viability of the public good. Thus, whereas in

previous times, state and local governments were supposed to be the gatekeepers for regulating the welfare of the general population, for Smith this role has become narrowly defined in terms of keeping the global economy running smoothly.

This story of economic policy may seem irrelevant to Gondry's eccentric story of historical revisionism and amateur analog technologies, but I think there is a lesson to be learned from Smith's tale of two cities, namely that in an age of global capital the urban environment is increasingly structured to "express the impulses of capitalistic production rather than social production" (2002:427). As we saw earlier with Setha Low's critique of the commercialization of public spaces, the privatization of public space can be detrimental to public access and democratic participation, as economic needs trump issues of social value and collective viability. However, and this is the point that I believe is raised in Gondry's film, while it is easy to see this trend materialize in economic policies, for Smith the act of calibrating the urban environment to mirror the demands and needs of the global economy often times takes many forms which may be disguised as good will gifts to the public.

One of these imperatives, which relates to Gondry's cinematic city, is the growing process of global gentrification. Gentrification has been the subject of much research over the past few decades and it is not possible to deal with all the nuanced features associated with gentrification here. However, given that Gondry's film deals with urban redevelopment in racial and ethnic terms it is important to note how gentrification cannot be dissociated from the "white flight" phenomena¹⁴. As Sharon Zukin (2009;1989) writes, urban redevelopment and gentrification is very much a racial process. During the post war period, for example, governments encouraged

¹⁴ For an examination of the way "white flight" appears in cinema see Avila's *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*.

out-migration from cities by investing in the development of the suburbs. This peripheral development, however, was not open to all ethnic groups; rather the ideal family home was distinctly white middle class (2009:5). Subsequently, with this process of white flight, cities were often left to ethnic minorities, who transformed many urban neighborhoods into distinctly ethnic spaces.

During the 1980s and 1990s when many city officials came to realize that cities were suffering from “an image crisis,” urban redevelopment became an instant buzzword for those officials who desired to turn the “derelict and wasted spaces” of the inner city into attractive spaces that could rival the suburbs. This led to an official “gentrification” process where investors used culture, luxury accommodations and safe and pristine shopping centers to encourage people to flee the suburbs and return to the rebranded urban centers. Again, this return cannot be separated from issues of ethnicity and race. Describing the way Brooklyn, especially Williamsburg, massively overhauled its image in the 80s, by attracting young hipsters who established various new cultural scenes, Zukin demonstrates how the reversal of “white flight” equally depended on the re-establishment of white values, as older ethnic neighbors were replaced by an ethnically white image of cosmopolitanism (2009:38).

The importance of Smith’s work involves the way he sees this process of gentrification as general phenomena that must be contrasted from earlier periods of gentrification. That is, while gentrification has been around since the 1950s and 1960s, when isolated working class areas in certain key cities like London and New York were taken over and redeveloped by an incoming middle class, according to Smith, this earlier stage of gentrification is no longer applicable to the global era. While no urban municipality would dare to group its policies under the banner of gentrification, for

Smith, the many “re-constructive” or “redevelopment” policies featured throughout the world use the same principles of gentrification to remake space in terms conducive to the imperative of capitalism. Thus, one of the significant changes involving contemporary gentrification is the wide scope of its reach: whereas previously only a few ultra-metropolitan areas like Paris, London and New York experienced gentrification, now virtually every city in the western world, even industrial centers like Cleveland, Detroit and Pittsburgh, are experimenting with urban re-branding and city clean up (the case of Pittsburg is particularly revealing, as the city has been rebranded as one of the most “green” cities in America). As Smith writes,

Most importantly, perhaps, a highly local reality, first identified in a few major advanced cities such as London, New York, Paris, and Sydney, is now virtually global. Its evolution has been both vertical and lateral. On the one hand, gentrification as a process has rapidly descended the urban hierarchy; it is evident not only in the largest cities but in more unlikely centers such as the previously industrial cities of Cleveland or Glasgow, smaller cities like Malmo or Grenada, and even small market towns such as Lancaster, Pennsylvania or Ceslté Krumlov in the Czech Republic. At the same time, the process has diffused geographically as well, with reports of gentrification from Tokyo to Tenerife (Garcia 2001), Sao Paulo to Puebla, Mexico (Jones and Varley 1999), Cape Town (Garside 1993) to the Caribbean (Thomas 1991), Shanghai to Seoul....The important point here is the rapidity of the evolution of an initially marginal urban process first identified in the 1960s and its ongoing transformation into a significant dimension of contemporary urbanism (2002:239).

In addition to the spread of these redevelopment projects throughout the globe are the ways in which urban development is consistently understood as a joint private-public initiative. It is no longer the self-interest of the real estate market that drives the redevelopment process. Rather cleaning up the city in order to attract international investments, tourist dollars and media spectacles are inscribed within official public policy. As Smith writes about the new role state agencies play in gentrification:

This language of urban renaissance is not new, of course, but it takes on far greater significance here. The scale of ambitions for urban rebuilding has expanded dramatically. Whereas state-sponsored post-war urban renewal in Western cities helped to encourage scattered private-market gentrification, that gentrification and the intensified privatization of inner-city land and housing markets since the 1980s has, in turn provided the platform on which large-scale multifaceted urban regeneration plans, far outstripping 1960s urban renewal, are established... Whereas the key actors in Glass's story was assumed to be middle and upper class immigrants to a neighborhood, the agents of urban regeneration thirty five years later are governmental, corporate, or corporate-government partnerships. A seemingly serendipitous, unplanned process that popped up in the post war housing market is now, at one extreme, ambitiously and scrupulously planned (2002:238,239).

This for Smith is the most insidious aspect of the new process of gentrification, since the use of politically correct terms like "urban regeneration" or "urban renaissance" hides the fact that these acts are really just gentrification by other means. In *Be Kind Rewind* several of Smith's claims about gentrification come into focus. The first and perhaps most subtle involves the film's obscure representation of Passaic, New Jersey. Unlike many notable films which tackle the problems of gentrification by excavating the streets and buildings of New York City's famous neighborhoods (*Brave New York*, *Everyday People*, *7th Street*, *batteries not included*) Gondry avoids framing his story of gentrification against this traditional backdrop. Indeed, just as Fletcher's revisionist account of the real site of American Jazz downplays the cultural importance of New York, the film's exploration of what is lost through the eradication of the architectural environment equally depends on exploring a far more marginal environment. In short, this is not the dominant story of New York's fight against gentrification and for the legacy of its diverse neighborhoods. Rather, as we see immediately from the opening shots, Fletcher's building is a sign of all those forgotten sites that fall outside the cultural and social radar.

The scene in which Gondry sets up this opposition is easy to miss. As the credits begin, we are given a long aerial shot that begins from some distant place outside New York City; as we hover over some undisclosed part of the city, with its endless artery of freeways and bridges, we see the city center in the distance and its bundle of iconic, shimmering towers. However, while it might appear that the film will take the viewer right into the excitement of the city center, Gondry stops short of this typical itinerary. While we can see the iconic New York skyline in the distance, the viewer is never allowed to step within the city limits. The camera instead takes a detour into the far-from glitzy city of Passaic. With a slight shift in direction, the camera, which has been focused on the glittering global city in the distance, suddenly veers under an overpass, where we find the heroes of our story painting graffiti on an underpass wall.

The transition from the iconic to the obscure is swift but significant. On one hand, the move towards the peripheral could be read as the desire to escape the cultural dominance of certain key areas that dominate the cultural imaginary. This fits well with the film's exploration of historical revisionism, as the members of the neighborhood graft their own anti-New York history of Jazz great Fats Waller; in this sense, the move away from the iconic belongs to a desire to emphasize the different ways local groups consume and relate to dominant cultural products. At the same time, the move towards a marginal environment need not be read in an oppositional vein. As Smith argues in terms of the widening effect of the process of gentrification, where virtually all urban areas become victims of the process of urban rebranding, the story of Passaic's encounter with gentrification could be read allegorically, a tale of the

“global reach of gentrification,” where even remote, obscure places like Passaic are not free from the global march of urban redevelopment.

A second facet of Smith’s concern over the new process of gentrification, especially the way public reconstruction policies disguise their gentrifying characteristics, is also evidenced in the film. The scene again is brief but poignant. After finding out that his building is destined for demolition, Fletcher proceeds to city hall, where he is greeted by a very pessimistic city official, who is adamant about the inevitability of the building’s destruction. While for Fletcher the fate of the building is far from sealed (after all he will propose a plan to save the building) for the city official the building’s destiny has already been resolutely decided. Even more devastating to Fletcher are the derogatory and racially-charged statements the official makes regarding the social standing of the building and Fletcher’s “proper” place of residence. “As a tenement house,” the official declares, “the city has no choice but to rid the neighborhood of this public health risk.” As if reducing his home to a poor house wasn’t enough, the official then has the nerve to try and console Fletcher by suggesting that he relocate to the projects, as if this highly stigmatized place were the natural fit for someone of Fletcher’s social and racial status.

As in other black urban films, such as Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* or John Singleton’s *Boyz in the Hood*, Gondry shows how the matter of urban access needs to be explored via racial discourses. However, what is unique about Gondry’s film is that the restrictions imposed upon racial bodies possess neither the excessive violence nor police brutality evidenced in other films about power and race. Indeed, in Gondry’s film the “policing of spatial boundaries” appears rather benign. Fletcher’s fated move to the projects is not achieved by way of brute physical force; there are no great

outbursts of violence, where tempers flare and whole neighborhoods become the victims of random acts of brutality. Rather, Fletcher's access to the city is determined in the banal office of the city's urban development office, with boring speeches about public health and affordable living.

Yet while Gondry's stance on racial urban politics may not possess the "shock and awe" of other films, the process of gentrification evidenced in the film is no less insidious. In a picture-perfect image of Smith's notion of the deceptive private-public initiatives of current urban reconstruction projects, Gondry invites us to consider how the fairly "objective" claims made by the city official about public safety are influenced by outside, private interests. For example, in the city hall scene not only is Fletcher confronted by a city official, who is supposed to represent the larger public interest, but he must also deal with a second figure representing a private real-estate developer.

It pays to look at the *mise en scene* of this scene. To the left of Fletcher we find a private developer. Deeply invested in Fletcher's case, since he needs to get rid of Fletcher's building in order to start a new condominium project, the developer insists that his only desire is improving the living conditions of the people of Passaic. In short, Fletcher's building must be removed to make way for the hope and prosperity of the future. Or, put in another way, the individual rights of Fletcher need to be sacrificed for the greater collective good. To make his point, the developer constantly makes reference to a glossy placard that features a before and after image of how his urban development project will improve the city. The picture, of course, belongs to those standard architectural displays which give the prospective buyer an image of what the future building will look like, even giving details about the kind of community (here a decidedly white community) that will emerge through the urban

project. But what is most striking about this placard is how both the present and the future are condensed within the same visual plane. In the first image (present) we find a partially completed utopia. All the new buildings are in place, the city have been cleaned up and people are pleasantly enjoying their new homes; however this image is marred by one thing: sitting in the corner is an old decrepit area, where Fletcher's building stands in strong contrast to the monotone ambience of the rest of the buildings. But, then, to visually display how easily this partial utopia can be fully realized, the developer peels back the image of Fletcher's building revealing, underneath it, the remaining part of the architectural whole.

On the right of Fletcher, however, we find the agent of the public good, a departmental official who speaks, not in terms of urban regeneration or progress, but through the agency of the law. Unlike her counterpart, whose sentiments form qualitative judgments (i.e. Passaic will be better off without Fletcher's building) the public official speaks only in terms of a quantitative logic: since Fletcher's building is not up to the city's building codes it must be destroyed. Yet by bringing together both poles, Gondry suggests that the process of gentrification requires both agents to expedite the regenerative urban process. However, what is problematic about this joint initiative is the win-win situation it implies and the way in which neither group comes to overtly represent the evils commonly associated with gentrification. Instead, from either side, the regenerative process seems undeniably optimistic. Who, after all, would want to resist the developer's promise of progress? Or from the official's standpoint, who would want to stand behind a governmental agency that turns a blind eye to the hazards of an unsafe building. Phrased this way, then, the combination of

public safety and private progress forms an unbeatable concoction, which few would easily describe in term of a yuppie process of gentrification.

But, as Smith recognizes, disguising the social inequalities associated with gentrification through an official urban policy of urban regeneration does not magically eliminate the social injustices integral to so called urban beautifying projects. Rather, current urban policies, as this scene effectively captures, are all the more deceptive, since the blatant social problems represented in earlier forms of gentrification are now promoted in the name of the urban whole. Thus, whereas one could previously use public governments to oppose, curb or question the powers private developers possess in reshaping the city, the alliance of these public-private initiatives eliminates a key way citizens can question urban politics.

Disruption 2: Memory Machines and Sweding: A Solution to Global Gentrification?

While no one would deny that gentrification involves the act of physical erasure, Gondry shows how, alongside gentrification's destruction of the architectural environment, we encounter the more nebulous questions of memory and forgetting. As we will see, buildings are not simply enclosures that house people in the present, but architecture forms a durable archive of the past. Indeed, unlike other "prosthetic forms of memory," wherein the life span of the object (clothing, websites, etc.) is short, architecture has a tendency to persist, to extend its life beyond many generations. However, as Paul Virilio writes, because of the increased speed of contemporary societies, where progress is defined in terms of high rates of change or turnover time, architecture no longer maintains its role of durability. Speaking about architecture's loss of duration Virilio writes:

The acceleration of history that we have witnessed in so many aspects of life has of course not made an exception with regard to the life span of buildings. In contrast to previous epochs, a building today is not built to last forever. Just as the vehicle in the course of “progress” has been continuously gaining speed, the life span of buildings has also accelerated, something that manifest in their early ageing and swift deterioration. An eloquent example of this is found in the fact that, whereas up to now, a construction permit was enough to put up a building, nowadays in the United States, and soon in France too, you also need a demolition permit. The transient duration of a building is therefore being projected in advance by the planners. A building has ceased to be something lasting, something eternal, as it used to be. As its life span is now limited to fifty or hundred years, it has become something of a moment in time, a three-dimensional image that will vanish before long (2001: 58).

As we have already seen, for the real estate developer the demolition of Fletcher’s building is a requirement for the good of the neighborhood: demolition, in short, is the only way into the future. But the question that lingers in *Be Kind Rewind* is what happens when the building is gone? What happens to all of the memories and stories that were once connected to the architectural environment? Can these precarious memories be saved when there is no longer any architectural support or must they too be discarded to the rubbish pile of the past?

In most of Gondry works the themes of time and memory are quite palpable, especially the way Gondry insists that memory is not simply an individual matter, an archive contained within the subject, but memory and time are intimately linked to the technologies we use in everyday life. Since memories are both crafted and retrieved through various technological interfaces, the way we treat our technologies (whether they are rendered obsolete or useless) deeply effects way the past is preserved. In his critically acclaimed film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, for example, Gondry considered the issue of prosthetic memories through a damning depiction of new technologies as machines designed only for forgetting. Here, high technology joined forces with the neurosciences in order to create a medical treatment where people

could have their painful memories extracted and destroyed. However, whereas Gondry's task then was to show how technologies could pull people further apart (in the film relationships cease to exist because people forget each other) in *Be Kind Rewind* Gondry moves in the other directions, showing how the risk of erasure actually brings people closer together.

In the next section I will explore this latter issue of memory, especially the way the film frames the question of remembrance and forgetting in terms of new and old video technologies. As I already argued, the first encounter with the (un)homely entailed the way gentrification rendered Fletcher's building an obsolete blight on the local urban environment. However, it is Fletcher's response to this dilemma that creates the situation for a new disruption, an alteration that focuses on Fletcher's desire and ability transform his home into a successful video rental business. Indeed, while the odds are stacked against Fletcher, he nonetheless hopes that by moving to the DVD format he will become more competitive and subsequently magically save his building. But, as we learn, it is not Fletcher's conformity to the media industry that provides a glimmer of hope for the soon-to-be homeless workers of the store; instead, hope occurs via a surprising disruption to the home, an uncanny act of erasure that initiates Mike and Jerry's creative adventure in amateur filmmaking.

Sweding or a Lesson in Creative Erasure

As mentioned previously, Jerry is the neighborhood nutcase. This eccentricity is openly displayed when, during Fletcher's leave of absence, Jerry convinces Mike to help him sabotage the local power plant, since he believes that it is sending out subliminal messages. During the sabotage, however, Mike abandons Jerry, leaving him to attempt the job himself, a fate that proves quite costly, as Jerry ends up being

electro-magnetized by a freak accident. Interestingly, just as a disruption to the home creates the narrative crisis that must be remedied by the characters, it is another uncanny intrusion on the home that provides the narrative solution. For when Jerry shows up the next day feeling ill and distraught from his accident, he inadvertently destroys Fletcher's entire collection of VHS rentals. Jerry, it seems, has been electro-magnetized and his mere presence in the store causes all the video content to be erased.

While Jerry's accident is initially perceived as a total disaster, it turns out that it is this ubiquitous act of erasure that leads Mike and Jerry to their creative encounter with "sweding" popular Hollywood films. Armed with an old analog camera and some make shift props, Mike and Jerry hope that they can cover up the accidental erasure by making their own amateur remakes of the movies. However, when a crew of hipster kids discovers their "sweded" copy of *Ghost Busters*, Mike and Jerry's adventure in filmmaking turns out to be extremely lucrative. Demanding other films, like their "sweded" copy of *Ghostbusters*, the kids, it seems, are willing to even finance more amateur productions. With time the whole neighborhood catches on and in the span of a few days Fletcher's building is transformed into a creative hot spot, a desired space in the neighborhood that, as we will see, forms the starting ground for a whole collective lesson in historical fabulation.

There are three interrelated points that I wish to make regarding this second encounter with the (un)homely. They include: Gondry's discourse on technology, especially the deeply political matter of the capitalistic desire for new technologies and the immense waste produced through this imperative; second, the matter of audience participation and the possibility of collective engagements with mass media and

technologies; and third, how the former relates to matters of collective memory and the art and meaning of revising the past.

“Sweding,” Or How Analog Video Was Used To Fight Gentrification

Media experimentation has been at the forefront of Gondry’s career, where his work with numerous media formats - from experiments in music videos and commercials to his work in the social documentary and popular narrative films - has rested on the implementation of new and visually interesting stylistics. Yet, what has always struck me about Gondry’s work, especially in relation to his innovations at the level of the visual plane of the filmic image, is that while his works appear to utilize the latest computer generated effects to create a dizzying array of virtual worlds and image manipulations, his work conversely demonstrates how these innovations do not depend on the so-called ingenious sphere of digital media. Indeed, working in the manipulative tradition of Georges Méliès, where special effects are created on set and depend on innovative camera and lens techniques and creative set designs, Gondry’s approach consistently demonstrates how many of the novel visual displays exhibited throughout his oeuvre can in fact be produced without the aid of high technology. For if the digital revolution conjures up an airy, dematerialized conception of the filmic image, where the real creative work takes place in the post-production studio, freed from actual sets and material objects (think of the latest trend in using “green screens” to create filmic environments) Gondry shows how working with the heavy and tangible world of the pro-filmic reality still offers many creative opportunities for the filmmaker.

In previous films like *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *The Science of Sleep* Gondry demonstrated how a range of innovative practices - from basic animation

techniques and unique set designs to sophisticated CGI effects and in-camera montage effects – could be used to pull the viewer into the strange and vivid world of memories and dreams. With *Be Kind Rewind* Gondry opts for an even more minimalist approach, as he resurrects the obsolete world of analog video to create a lo-fi homage to the beginnings of cinema technology. Indeed, instead of having his amateur filmmakers showcase what can be done with the highly affordable and assessable digital camera, Gondry adopts a deeply amateur setup consisting only of an older, analog video camera and a series of average, everyday props (cardboard cut outs, pipes, marshmallows) to recreate some of Hollywood's most technologically sophisticated popular films.

Within a media environment, where high tech prophets continually advance the idea that the digital revolution has allowed for greater access to media content and production, in a world where video-uploading sites, like You Tube, allow millions of people to share and watch an endless barrage of amateur videos, how should we interpret Gondry's explicit use of outdated media technologies? Why use analog video when the digital trend is supposed to offer so much more by way of access, participation and creativity?

One explanation could be that claims that equate digital media with instant access and greater democratic participation are, for Gondry, largely and grossly oversimplified; this way, the return to an older media format might suggest that all the latest hoopla over the democratization of digital media hasn't really advanced us much further than older analog formations. In other words, simply updating a media format is not the solution to questions of collective participation in the media. Another way in which we can interpret the use of analog media in the film involves the way media

technologies converge with spatial practices, especially the way old technologies do not disappear when they are rendered obsolete, but sediment in various junk spaces, especially the home. That is, the return of analog video raises questions about how we treat and deal with cultural waste.

In his article “Exhausted Commodities: The Material Culture of Music,” Will Straw describes the different temporal rhythms and spatial configurations that come about through the physical and semiotic decay of cultural objects. According to Straw, the ubiquitous processes of cultural obsolescence endemic to capitalistic societies do not depend on magical acts of disappearance, whereby a product that’s ‘here today and gone tomorrow’ immediately vaporizes into thin air, leaving no or little material trace of its posthumous flow through the marketplace. Rather decaying artifacts continue on after their designation as cultural waste and are caught up in new processes of circulation. As Straw writes regarding the decay of music:

This article presumes that obsolete objects do not simply disappear, giving way to a future which will unfold without them, but persist and circulate throughout the commercial markets of contemporary life. It is concerned, in large measure, with those processes through which musical recordings become cultural waste, as their meanings and value are exhausted. This involves an attention to time, to the life cycles of cultural commodities and the ways in which they age. It invites us, as well, to focus on questions of space, on the accumulation of exhausted commodities alongside each other, in the retail sites and other institutions which have evolved to contain them.

Crucial to Straw’s observation that cultural objects persist, despite their obsolescence, are the various ways cultural artifacts objects actually decay. All products are subject to both physical and semiotic modes of decay and, in large part, what determines whether a product becomes a form of cultural waste depends on how both of these processes interrelate. Certain products, like electronic devices, such as televisions, video cameras and computers, are physically exhausted over a relatively

long span of time, hypothetically lasting up to 20 years. Other cultural items, like food items or media events, are subject to a short “shelf-life” wherein the item is consumed immediately. This same process of decay also applies to the semiotic value of cultural objects. While some products are “eternally” esteemed by consumers and rest on enduring semiotic value (think of the almost eternal value of “diamond rings”) other products go out of fashion quite quickly.

What Straw’s article emphasizes is that the physical and semiotic rates of decay are not always congruent. A product which is “built to last” may not even reach the market, or, due to design flaws or lack of consumer interest, may see its semiotic status plummet. Given this situation, where objects may or may not achieve the same rates of semiotic and physical decay, the pertinent question becomes what happens to all these products that are left for the cultural heap pile. What happens to those products that persist physically but are no longer of cultural value? As Straw writes, “[h]ere, an analysis of cultural artefacts almost of necessity becomes an ecological analysis, in the broadest sense of the term. The accumulation of artefacts for which there is no longer any observable social desire invites us to deal with the question of how we deal with cultural waste.”

Straw’s point about the ecological ramifications of cultural waste offers an excellent way of decoding Gondry’s media politics. While the film undoubtedly invites the viewer to consider the waning semiotic value of a decrepit old building, equally striking is how Fletcher’s building becomes a container for an innumerable number of objects and devices discarded to the junkspaces of contemporary culture. As Straw observes, when objects decay semiotically they do not physically disappear but accumulate and sediment in various abject spaces. Here they often become a stockpile

of discarded inventions, cultural tastes and consumer products, the very stuff that, as the real estate agent proclaims, impedes the city's progress. And nowhere are these spaces of cultural decay more evident than in Fletcher's decrepit building. Housing an outdated VHS rental shop and a thrift store, Fletcher's building quite simply functions as a museum of cultural waste, as the shop is littered with an array of old relics and technologies of the past, from the obsolete VHS tapes that are lined against the wall to the old records, photos, gramophones and televisions that are seen piled up in clutters of technological waste.

To use a term employed by Rem Koolhaas, Fletcher's building points to the reality of modernity's Junkspaces:

If space-junk is the human debris that litters the universe, Junk-Space is the residue mankind leaves on the planet. The built... product of modernization is not modern architecture but Junkspace. Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout. Modernization had a rational program: to share the blessings of science, universally. Junkspace is its apotheosis, or meltdown... Although its individual parts are the outcome of brilliant inventions, lucidly planned by human intelligence, boosted by infinite computation, their sum spells the end of Enlightenment, its resurrection as farce, a low-grade purgatory...Junkspace is the sum total of our current achievement; we have built more than did all previous generations put together, but somehow we do not register on the same scales. We do not leave pyramids. According to a new gospel of ugliness, there is already more Junkspace under construction in the twenty-first century than has survived from the twentieth... (2002:175).

For Koolhaas, modernity represents a mode of production that is excessively additive: every invention created leads to more and more inventions, along a fragmented and erratic line of endless production. Junk-Space is literally the outcome of a ubiquitous littering process. But strangely, despite its unending accumulation, Junk-space is also ephemeral. Echoing Virilio's concern over contemporary architecture's lack of durability, Koolhaas' Junkspace also represents the excessively transient. Speaking about Junkspaces' relation to previous architecture, Koolhaas

writes: “Like multiple Babels, huge superstructures would last through eternity, teeming with impermanent subsystems that would mutate over time, beyond their control. In Junkspace, the tables are turned: it is subsystem only, without superstructure, orphaned particles in search of a framework or pattern. All materialization is provisional...” (2002:178).

Interestingly, Junk-Space is an orphaned order: it is a world of provisional stuff without a home. In the film, Fletcher’s building serves as an evocative sign of the way old technologies accumulate in certain spaces. Their home is not a coherent abode, but an erratic archive of what has been left behind. But while the film shows how excessive production leads to stockpiles of junk that accumulate in abject spaces, waste can also be read in terms of one’s social standing: as someone who sees value in the obsolete, as someone unable to depart with the past simply because it is old, Fletcher represents a kind of waste connoisseur. This is seen in his initial unwillingness to update his business to the latest DVD format. Whereas the rest of the world remains in tune with the digital revolution, moving to the ebbs and flows of consumer cultures, Fletcher is stuck in a media limbo, accumulating an archaic media environment that seems perfectly content without either the DVD revolution or the rise of big superstore movie rental chains like Blockbuster. Indeed, in contrast to the “new,” Fletcher lives in a pre-digital dreamscape, a baroque media world that does not valorize the digital as the most progressive or pure media form, but allows various media forms to exist in simultaneity.

But while the viewer is invited to see Fletcher’s outdated world as a charming space, from the point of view of the urban developer, Fletcher really belongs to what Martha Rosler calls the negative social stigma of obsolescence: “Staying up to date

with high-touch and high-tech goods not only is frequently associated with improved social standing but is also conflated with civic participation, citizenship, or nationalism. Obsolescence here bears a negative valence” (2002:7). As we have seen, it is this obsolescence that the urban developer so adamantly detests. Seeing Fletcher’s store more as a trash pile of media technologies than a successful neighborhood business, the urban developer represents the desire to always remain in an eternal present, to escape the cultural and historical reality of waste. It is not so much that he denies the past, rather it is that the past is used to justify and evoke the hope for a better present and future. Waste, in short, is good so long as it is happily replaced by something better.

Yet, while the urban developer seems quite sure of himself, especially regarding the need to replace the old with the new, at no point does he articulate a viable solution to how we should responsibly deal with the waste that is produced through urban redevelopment. Do one’s demolition papers also specify how to manage the debris left behind from calculated destruction? They apparently do not. By arguing that Fletcher should simply relocate to the projects, (presumably taking his waste with him) the developer proposes only a surface solution, since it merely attempts to move and displace the waste to another less conspicuous part of the city, an area that will become invariably the prime site for another infusion of novelty and gentrifying redevelopment. And the cycle continues.

If the process of gentrification represents the desire to calibrate the spaces of the city in order that certain spaces are freed from the baggage of cultural waste, the “sweding” business created by Mike and Jerry offers perhaps a more viable solution to how we may deal with waste: it can be recycled. That is, by infusing older

technologies with new dynamic purposes, new life can be breathed into the obsolete, resurrecting it from the trash bin of cultural inertia. As Straw argues, the process of decay is never definitive, but artifacts live on and circulate according to different temporal rhythms. A product that is cast to the junk-spaces of obsolescence can, and often do, return and regain its semiotic value. Subsequently, just as retro clothing items can suddenly become in vogue, achieving premium economic and semiotic status, older technologies and their content can be refashioned, recycled and resurrected so that their very out-datedness becomes crucial to their new semiotic life.

What is interesting about the fate of cultural waste in the film is the way analog video is positioned not only in terms of regained economic and semiotic value, but is presented as the community's mode of resistance. That is, by reviving the remnants and relics of an outdated past, a counter-discourse is articulated that is similar to the mode of resistance described by Rosler. Speaking about the way the outdated can forcefully remind us of the failed projects of the present, Rosler writes,

Is there a rupture in the house? A moment of resistance may (still) be offered by the cast-off commodity—when it first appears, intruding its repulsively worn-out presence into the present, not old enough to evoke nostalgia but only shame. This is not about the reinsertion of clothing styles into the fashion lexicon in imaginary bohemia, but about the moment before. In the “United States of Amnesia” (whose phrase is that?), these objects, not remanufactured but simply reappearing, evoke no positive memories. They are ridiculous. Worse, they point backward. But that constitutes their critical moment: The unease of the present is forced to the surface by reimagining our habitation of these discards. They are our past. They reconfigure past personal experiences into a *mise-en-scène* that testifies loudly to a pathetic failure of taste. Their pure dysfunctionality equals trash—or necessity. Useless as stylish accoutrements, cast-off clothing and personal accessories vie with the sad exposure of a previously—or presently—felt need. As pariah objects, they have a stench. If they are not wearables, they still rebuke us with having once desired them despite their clunky overreach. Their personality emerges as orphans. They remind us of all despised things and people, those who live in the Third World abroad or at home, of the arriviste taste our parents or relatives might have exhibited, old-country mentalities, loutishness. Need I continue? (2010:10)

By using analog video to compete with the world of digital media, the sweded films not only point to the fact that the past is prematurely exhausted (why the digital and why now) but they show how the present contains within it the inevitability of its own failure. Isn't this the true logic of buyer's remorse; that we invariably know that what is now current will soon be a sign of social backwardness; how sad it can be to revisit a product that used to be so trendy but is now slow, ugly and useless. This in part explains the counter-discourse of the analog videos, that in their uselessness (which is really always the uselessness of the present) they signal the waste of the past, that under the excessive production of contemporary times we can never be sure of our present acts of consumption.

While I think Rosler's comments about the return of the outdated apply to the film, there is another way we can interpret the return of analog video: by digging up the past, the use of analog video can be read as the desire to escape the speed and space of contemporary times. For if one of the goals of the contemporary technosphere is to calibrate all places, so that the entire globe moves to the same rhythmic beat, then the return to an antiquated technology allows at least some freedom from this technological procession. Thus, if the people of Passiac are unable to ward off the spatial threats represented by global gentrification, at least they have the ability to retreat into their own temporal media world. In this sense, falling behind the times becomes an antidote to a technosphere that requires all places to perpetually upgrade to the present moment.

Disruption 3

As Jerry and Mike's "sweding" film business begins to attract more and more consumers, Fletcher's building is quickly transformed from a space of outmoded

media to a hot spot in the city, as crowds of people line up to rent one of the latest recycled films. Realizing that they could sky-rocket their profits by allowing the local residents to star in their productions, Mike and Jerry transform Fletcher's building from a provider of pre-packaged media to an experiment in collective film production. Here, the film insists that what people really want is not to sit back as passive consumers but to engage creatively with the media on their own terms. Unleashing the active powers of the neighborhood, Mike and Jerry's success however ends up being the cause of their demise. As news of their weird films circulates (their success even appears on the national evening news) other neighboring cities begin to be captivated by the prospect of appearing in their own sweded films, as even people from New York begin lining up to appear in their own Hollywood remakes. While this outside interest improves profits, the national attention becomes a burden, as the local neighborhood must once again deal with another (un)homely intrusion.

And so, as soon as things are going really well, a new disruption to the home occurs, one which threatens to dampen the collective spirit of the film initiative. Like the previous disruptions to the home, this threat involves another massive conglomerate, one that brings a very different, more legalistic definition to the practice of cultural poaching. Since the community's film project uses copyrighted material to make its recycled films, a legal group representing the major Hollywood studios decides to shut them down. And shut down the business is exactly what they achieve, as Jerry and Mike are given the choice of either destroying all the "sweded" films or facing an unwinnable legal battle that would drain them of all their resources. The gloomy fate of Fletcher's building seems unavoidable; since Fletcher is barely able to

come up with the money to keep the building alive, the prospect of doing battle with Hollywood is quite simply too daunting and the lucrative film business is terminated.

Just as Gondry shows how the process of gentrification destabilizes the home and erases important architectural landmarks, the matter of copyright infringement is equally shown to impact the larger public sphere, especially the way local groups can use media to their advantage. For when the legal system shuts down the local film initiative what is at stake is not simply the viability of Fletcher's rental business, but the very process by which people communicate and share in the creation of cultural goods and services.

As James Carey (1988) writes, communication is never simply about the successful transmission of information across space, but is a communal act, where shared rituals allow collective groups to come together and participate in the creation of social reality. In the film this act of sharing is shown to be seriously jeopardized by a legal framework that understands cultural goods as products that not everyone can access. What's more, what is equally undermined by the law is the ability of local groups to take creative charge of what is produced by the media industry, to recycle and poach cultural goods in order to create something new and different. Indeed, as Siva Vaidhyanathan (2001) argues, when copyright laws seek to protect the profitability of large corporations above everyone else, what suffers are the ingenuity and creativeness that are instrumental in the collective and democratic production of culture. This is not to say that there is no role for copyright laws, but that when property rights trump egalitarian access, the law can no longer be said to be serving the greater public good.

The devastation that the copyright laws inflict upon Mike and Jerry's film business is quite evident. Having taken from them the cultural goods that they recycle into local masterpieces, the film collective quite simply no longer has a cultural ground to stand upon: not only are their language, cultural codes and narratives taken away, but the social glue that brings the community together is jeopardized. Yet, as soon as the narrative is bent on hopelessness, as soon as a final disruption to the home seems inevitable, the film suggests another answer to the desire for a vital collective cultural life, an answer that depends on what Gilles Deleuze calls the real art of fabulation.¹⁵

Noting the importance of the concept of fabulation in Deleuze's philosophy, Gregg Lambert writes: "Health as literature, as writing, consists in fabulation, which Deleuze defines as 'the invention of a people who is missing'; thus, 'the ultimate aim of literature is to set free, in the delirium, in this creation of a health, in this invention of a people, the possibility of a life'" (1998: 22).

For Deleuze fabulation is not simply the act of invention, or the creation of fantastic stories that strive for the impossible; rather fabulation is deeply political as it entails the invention of a people who are missing. Like the idea of utopia, wherein the future is the site of new worlds, fabulation rests on giving rise to possible worlds, on creating what one wants to be. However, for Deleuze, this creative aspect of invention always involves the political, as the becoming involved in creating the possible helps to bring together a people that have not yet been organized into a territory, to re-order the world such that the creation of new narratives creates new collectives. In short, individual acts of creation are never produced in solitude, but new communities are anticipated and forged through the acts of invention.

¹⁵ Deleuze's most elaborate conceptualization of fabulation can be found in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*.

Again, Lambert writes, “To use an expression that is invoked throughout Deleuze's work, and is principally inspired from Blanchot's writings, the writer's solitude cannot be reduced to a normal situation of solitude in the world, to an experience of being-alone and apart from others; this is because the figures above do not experience their aloneness from the perspective of this world, or of this society, or from the presence of others who exist, but rather from the perspective of another possible world or another community that these figures anticipate even though the conditions for this community are still lacking” (1998:26).

As we have seen, the “sweding” business can be read in terms of Deleuze’s political conception of creative inventions, as the act of poaching Hollywood films anticipates and creates a new aggregate of collective participants. That is, by inviting others from the neighborhood to create their own narratives, to force Hollywood to meet their needs and desires, a new territory is forged that gives rise to a new meaning of dwelling in the world. In short, the single home becomes many. Even when the business is terminated, the group still finds a new way to continue their filmic experiments. This time instead of manipulating the narrative discourse of Hollywood, the group turns their attention towards their roots, using the historical status of Fletcher’s building as the incentive to reinvent Passaic’s cultural past.

As mentioned previously, the importance of Fletcher’s building stems from its place within an alternative history of jazz music. As Fletcher enthusiastically proclaims in the opening voice-over-narration, whereas most people believe that the capital of jazz was Harlem, in fact the real hot-spot of jazz music in the 20’s and 30’s was the small town of Passaic, New Jersey. Each weekend, Fletcher continues, New Yorkers would venture across the river and spend all night partying to what would become one

of the greatest musical movements in American history. And what was the reason for such a dramatic migration to an otherwise marginal city? It was due to none other than local jazz hero Fats Waller. Born and raised in Fletcher's, the prolific Fats Waller was the town's cherished son, who not only charted new avenues in music, but enabled the town to flourish culturally.

Of course, anyone with even the most trivial knowledge of jazz history will immediately apprehend the absurdity of Fletcher's revisionist story of American jazz. Fletcher himself, near the end of the film, confesses that the story of Fats' birthplace was entirely fabricated, a bedtime story he devised for the young, orphaned Mike. However, as everyone knows, even the most innocent of lies can spread like wild fire and with time Mike becomes absolutely convinced that his home was the birthplace of a cultural legend. Like Deleuze's process of fabulation, for Fletcher's the art of fabrication represents a vital illusion, the necessary creation of a home in an otherwise (un)homely world. Indeed, for Mike, who was born without a home, the story of Fats not only provided him with a compelling reason to embrace his harsh surroundings, but it became the central way he was able to organize a new mode of collectivity, as the story became a shared piece of cultural history that could unite the entire neighborhood. But when the film initiative is terminated and Fletcher decides to finally tell Mike the truth about Fats Waller, Mike loses faith in his vital illusion and no longer perceives his surroundings as instrumental to the health of his community.

Yet, as usual, Jerry has a plan, a plan to get Mike out of his rut, a plan for a new film project that will not only reaffirm Fats' status as a local cultural icon, but will once again bring the neighborhood together to wage a final battle against the process of gentrification. As Jerry explains to Mike, while the copyright laws may prevent

them from copying Hollywood films, they always have the option to use the tools they have garnished to create their own films. Second, just because the story of Fats is false, there is no reason why it couldn't be true if the neighborhood came to believe in it. Indeed, through the act of fabulation, they can not only invent a people for the future, but can reshape the past in order for the neighborhood to reclaim a story that can function nonetheless as the ground of the community. And so using the same lo-fi stylistics found in the sweded films, Mike and Jerry once again bring together the neighborhood to create a pseudo-documentary about Passaic's local jazz hero.

Conclusion

In the last few moments of the film, everything is focused on the collective invention of a lie: from poaching the story of Fats Waller, his home life and origins, to creating a people in the future, the film collective shows once again the real powers of fabulation. However, not only does the act of fabulation relate to the future, but here fabulation involves all three registers of time. Indeed, by redrafting the past, by erasing the dominant and historical remembrance of Fats, the film poignantly explores what Marc Auge calls the creativity of oblivion, a kind of forgetting that is necessary for the creation of new social identities.

As I have argued earlier, *Be Kind Rewind* tells the story of what is potentially lost by the erasure of important architectural forms. By destroying Fletcher's home, the city authorities not only take command of the physical and material world, but they have access and control over the past. Indeed, by attempting to save the building from gentrification, Mike and Jerry work to preserve the neighbor's collective memory, to protect the community from the forced powers of forgetting. However, while memories are clearly about diminishing the act of forgetting, in the documentary

film on Waller we are presented with a very different kind of forgetting. For while it is common to think of forgetting as a form of loss, it is possible to understand forgetting, not simply as the binary opposite of memory, but as memory's point of origin. For what if memory was made possible only through the constitutive powers of forgetting, what if erasure was a kind of loss that is destructive and creative at the same time?

These are the questions that Marc Auge asks us to consider in his book *Oblivion*. As Auge poetically writes, "Memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea" (2004:20). With this image of a creative coupling of land and sea, Auge outlines a model of forgetting that is neither opposed to memory, nor its sign of failure. Rather, loss is memory's co-author, the energy and movement which carves out the past in retrievable traces, marks, or representation. In fact, memory is marked by a double figure of loss. Since the past is not a pure presence that can be retrieved in itself, but is returned in the form of representations - images, words, or sensations - all memories are traces or imprints of an irretrievable real. To forget, then, marks the absence of an already lost object. However, for Auge it is a necessary loss. For if everything were remembered, the past would become meaningless, as the weight and density of remembrance would overcome the present. "We must forget," Auge writes, "in order to remain present, forget in order not to die, forget in order to remain faithful" (2004:89).

Is this not what the community does in order to create a new identity in the future? Isn't the invention of Fats Waller's birthplace a mode of erasure that leads to new possibilities in the present and future? Indeed, just as Capra's classic used fantasy and erasure to provide an image of the civility of the All-American town, *Be Kind*

Rewind shows how the act of fabulation is a kind of creative erasure that can rescue an urban neighborhood from social anomie. As Carey argues, communication is really about reality building, a task the film collective attempts to create by bending the orders of time, rewriting the past (both at the level of technology and content) in order to act in the present. And while, in the end, the documentary film fails to save the building, the neighborhood nonetheless gains a new form of cultural memory and identity. And while, throughout the film, Gondry's gentle appraisal of the problems of gentrification often results in a nostalgic yearning for some earlier period of collective life, it does at least allow us to see how some part of our technological past can resurface to challenge the temporality of the present.

Chapter 4

No Place to Call Home: Work and Play in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Punch Drunk Love* and Jason Reitman's *Up In The Air*

Introduction

Over the past few years the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has initiated a rebranding campaign, which invites tourists to get off the beaten track and experience the cultural legacy of a province rich in history, charm and natural beauty. As an integral part of this campaign, the province has released a range of slick and glossy television commercials, which co-joins images of the province's rugged beauty with wholesome images of family life to depict a place frozen in time. In one of the commercials, the historical legacy of the province's rural heartland is praised through a montage which takes the viewer through some of the province's oldest towns. Undoubtedly one of the central messages of this commercial involves celebrating the province's deep historical roots (as each town is described, a caption appears that tells the viewer when it was founded), but equally important are the overarching themes of home and family values.

For as the viewer is taken inside each town, a plethora of charming images of the home are presented (kids frolicking together outside, a stunning wedding, a father raising his new born up into the air) that suggest that the true value of rural life involves not only the preservation of the past, but equally importantly are the wholesome family values that hold the community together. Indeed, as the

commercial subsidies, a voice over narrator declares - “Where is this place exactly? It is about as far away from Disneyland as you can possibly get.”

While it is hard to deny the charm, even uniqueness of these tourist advertisements, one thing that is far from unique is the way ads use images of the cozy and charming home to compete in the global marketplace. As Michael Schudson explains in “Advertising as Capitalist Realism,” positive images of the home and the ideal family unit are mainstays in the advertising industry, as the home provides the perfect vehicle for representing the prevailing desires and values of a given society.

Recalling a moving and emotional Coca Cola commercial Schudson writes,

One Coca Cola commercial I saw showed a boy running in a field. It cut to the farmyard where two attractive people, obviously mother and father, were standing by the barn. They open the barn doors and the camera goes back to the boy running faster. Back to the barn, a pony is brought out. The happy faces of the parents – sharing, by the way, a Coke. The boy, surprise and joy on his face, comes closer....The proud parents. The boy, lovingly looking at his Mom and Dad...And that was all. It was beautifully done. It brought the hint of tears to my eyes and it evoked great enthusiasm in the auditorium. The advertisement does not so much invent social values or ideals of its own as it borrows, usurps or exploits what advertisers take to be the prevailing social values. It then reminds us of beautiful moments in our own lives or it pictures magical moments we would like to experience (1984: 221).

For Schudson, commercials like these dwell on the “happy family” in order to elicit emotionally charged experiences, “magical moments” in which the desire or memory of a perfect family event reminds us exactly of what the “good life” is *supposed* to be about. However, for Schudson there is something deeply ironic about the use of the perfected domestic unit to promote the pursuits of capitalism. By insisting that the family unit and blood ties exist above and beyond all other social relations, one would think that images of the charming and wholesome home would directly compete, even clash with the logic of capitalist work, especially since the marketplace

often encourages rather than prevents the breakdown of the family. As Schudson writes,

There is little one would want to call “capitalistic” in these moments. Indeed, if capitalism is a system promoting private ownership, these ads are oddly anticapitalistic or noncapitalistic, honoring traditions of social solidarity like family, kinship and friendship that at least in principle are in conflict with the logic of the market. What is capitalistic is that these values are put to work to sell goods, invoked in the service of the marketplace. And what is distinctly capitalistic is that the satisfaction portrayed is invariably private...” (1984: 221).

In this chapter I will analyze several films in order to gauge some of the contradictions Schudson identifies as arising out of the precarious relationship between the spaces of capitalistic work and the home. Specifically, the (un)homely will be explored in terms of the conflicts and injustices that arise when the work world prevents people from attaining their right to create and maintain a home. In the first part of the chapter, I will look at the ways in which the ideal family home has been represented as a vital tool in the functioning of capitalism, as it becomes the pivotal space of refuge, free from the hardships of labor. This depiction of the home as “private oasis” will be underscored by an analysis of Katherine Shonefield’s work on cinematic architecture, where she shows that throughout the industrial age, the division between the work world and the home was necessarily purified, as the stresses and noise of the modern city were remedied through endless discourses on the maintenance and beatification of the domestic sphere. But while the home was pegged as a necessary safety zone that allowed men to escape from the drudgery of modern work, the confinement of women to the sphere of unpaid domestic labor raises serious questions about how the home for women was far from a zone of protection or a relaxing space free from work.

In second part of the chapter I will look at how the industrial demarcation between home and work undergoes a transformation: whereas the home during early modern times was represented as the necessary refuge men required to battle the drudgery of work, in contemporary times this division has broken down, as the spaces of work converge with the spaces of the home. Thus, if the home is often represented as a comfortable refuge centered on blissful consumption, what happens when these images are shattered by the harsh, competitive realities of a 24 hour work world? Can the ideal home withstand the pressures of the increased mobility of modern work? And how does consumption change when the pleasure of buying becomes yet another form of labor? Through an analysis of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Punch Drunk Love* and Jason Reitman's *Up in the Air* I will look at how the burdens of contemporary work lead to quite different and competing images of the proper function of the home. While for some, the unmoored reality of mobile work will require a comparable kind of home – a mobile home or a home on the go – for others the disarray created by hyper transience will conjure the need for a retreat into nostalgia, as the defense of the home is required to combat the ubiquity of work.

The Spaces of Cinema: Finding the Line between Home and Work

In her book *Walls Have Feelings: Architecture, Film and the City*, Katherine Shonfield describes the deep and complex relationship between cinematic and architectural space. Like architecture, which structures the environment by imposing boundaries between what is considered inside and outside, between what is considered private and public space, the cinema also creates different spatial configurations that highlight the difference between exterior and interior spaces. For Shonfield these boundaries are useful in the analysis of film because they help identify how space is

rendered meaningful and interlinked with modes of social and political power. How the boundaries of inside and outside are demarcated, in other words, is indicative of the social structures, practices and values prevalent in a given society.

One of the most interesting ways in which Shonfield deploys her spatial analysis occurs in chapter four of her book, where she argues that in many modern films the spatial boundaries between the spaces of work and the spaces of the home were acutely represented through the division between the suburbs and the city. Whereas in many films the domestic home was associated with peripheral spaces, such as the ideal suburban home, work environments invariably involved public urban spaces that were often depicted as harsh and hostile masculine spaces not befitting women. As Shonfield writes,

The division between home and work has its impact on the sexes and their territories: women at home are in charge of, and in a sense embody, the decorative interior. In contrast is the man at work and the male flaneur who can inhabit the city as his own expanse, placed between two interior worlds, the domestic and work. So, the fate of the interior in the 1950s and 1960s is intertwined with what happens to the exterior: the revised physical form of the post-war city, and in particular the means to move through the city's – and its inhabitants' – *body* (2000:77).

As many feminist thinkers have argued, the modern demarcation between the suburbs and city not only entailed a division in where work and leisure were located, but it helped reinforce a new world of gender inequalities.¹⁶ During the mid-20th

¹⁶ While for the most part my reading of gendered space comes from Shonfield's book, it is important to emphasize that there is a rich body of research that has explicated the way geographic spaces, especially the demarcation between work and home, is played out in gender terms. Indeed, often referred to as Feminist Geography, this research emphasizes how the home has traditionally been perceived as the "natural" site of women and domestic labor. See, for example, Giles' *Parlour and the Suburb : Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*, Rose's *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Massey's *Space, Place and Gender*, Malos' *The Politics of House Work*, Hanson and Pratt's *Gender, Work and Space* and McDowell's "Space, place and gender relations: Part I. Feminist empiricism and the geography

century, for example, many social discourses and practices envisioned the suburban home as the natural site for women, whose central task was to create a home life that was uncontaminated by the stress and burdens of modern work. Of course there is a notable contradiction in this depiction of the home as a space free from work, since for women the home was a site of unpaid labor. Nonetheless, as many publications, trade journals, reformist organizations and politicians emphasized,¹⁷ the proper role of women in the new modern world was to be reduced to that of the domestic housewife, a role that sought to ensure that the home functioned as a space in opposition to work, a place that emphasized comfort over drudgery, pleasure over sacrifice, and power over subservience.

While many of these processes are much more complex than Shonefield describes,¹⁸ her main point is to show that with modern conditions of production the

of social relations” and “Feminist economic geographies: gendered identities, cultural economies and economic change.”

¹⁷ In “Getting the Houses to the People: Edward Bok, the Ladies' Home Journal, and the Ideal House,” Leland examines the way the domestication of women was a central concern for many American political progressives who believed that social reform began at home: emphasizing the importance of the “idealized single-family house,” many reformers, during the early part of the 20th century emphasized the importance of ensuring that everyone had access to the idealized single family home. In “The Cure for Domestic Neglect: Better Homes in America, 1922-1935” Janet Hutchison looks at the “Better Homes in America” campaign that was popular in the early part of the 20th century. As she writes, “In 1922, concerned individuals formulated a unique housing campaign, Better Homes in America. The purpose of this campaign was to cure home neglect through an educational program that combined the nineteenth-century republican values of thrift and self-reliance with twentieth-century household technology. While the prescribed woman's place remained in the home, promoters believed that the modern twentieth-century housewife should be a trained expert, discriminating consumer, and moral arbitrator within a defined architectural setting (168).”

¹⁸ For example while by and large women were relegated to domestic positions, there were exceptions to this rule. Massey and McDowell for instance argue that while working women were largely scorned by Victorian society, some women still found work outside the home; furthermore, Sarah Pink argues that even though women are often socially positioned within the domestic sphere, this does not automatically mean that the home is experienced as a space of loneliness, containment, disempowerment or injustice. Rather, some women may, in fact,

function of the spaces of the home and work became much more rigid and purified. Home is home and work is work. This division however did not mean that both spaces remained unrelated; rather the creation of a cozy domestic interior was perceived as necessary to the smooth functioning of capitalism. As Shonfield argues, with the risks associated with the rise of industrial labor practices, such as the danger of working in polluted factories or the long work hours, there emerged a growing concern over the health and well-being of workers. As modern work conditions became more and more stressful, workers, in short, would require some homely place of peace and quiet that could momentarily take them away from the pressures of labor. While the domestic home wasn't the only antidote to the problems of life in the modern industrial city (the creation of green spaces, such as the many great urban parks that appeared throughout the 20th century is another case in point), the single family home did occupy a large presence in the social imaginary, becoming the key site of refuge from the malaise of modern urban life.

For Shonfield and others it is important to map this change in the space of work and home along gender lines: whereas the 'man of the house' was expected to travel to the workplace and endure a harsh and competitive public sphere, where work was taxing, difficult and fast paced, women were to retain the domestic role as caretaker and guardian of the home. But this domestic role was no trivial matter. In order for the modern work environment to function efficiently, a good family life was a firm requirement; and to meet this demand, women everywhere worked hard to

experience the home as an empowering and active site. Finally, not all women experienced the modern city as a fiercely hostile environment that was only accessible for men. Rather, according to Elizabeth Wilson and Lloyd and Johnson, the city often formed a site of freedom and liberation for women, as the urban experience provided some relief from their life as housewives.

adorn the family home, cooking, cleaning, and decorating the home in order to create the greatest degree of comfort possible for their laboring husbands. As Kirsi Saarikangas writes regarding the way women were in charge of the aesthetization of the home, “texts celebrating the idea of beauty of the home tend to identify the woman both with the home and with beauty. The woman is the soul of the home. By creating beauty she effectuates her feminine nature, and thereby also sweetens the lives of the other members of the family. It was up to the woman to create the domestic milieu and the homely atmosphere. In this spiritual private woman we glimpse the domestic angel in her purest form” (1993:66).

Working Homes: Blurring the Spaces of Modern Work

Just as Shonefield evokes the barriers between inside and outside to explore women’s domestic position in many modern films, in “Everywhere You Want To Be: Introduction to Fear” Brian Massumi considers how in postmodern societies the line between production and consumption has imploded, such that it is the very “notion of “internalization that proves inadequate. For if the capitalist relation has colonized all of geographical and social space, it has no inside into which to integrate things. It has become an unbounded space - in other words, a space coextensive with its own inside and outside. It has become a field of immanence (or exteriority). It has not "internalized," in the sense of integrating; it has displaced and intensified, coaching mutually exclusive forms into uneasy coexistence”(1993:18).

As Massumi goes on to argue, the success of earlier forms of capitalism had everything to do with maintaining the boundaries between interior and exterior space. That is, in order to ensure that economic equilibrium was attained and workers remained dedicated to the world of industrialism, a wager or trade-off was required: in

return for giving their labor and time to the modern work force, workers were given union rights, leisure time, disposable income and the ability to consume. As Masumi writes,

Social equilibrium was to be attained by integrating the working class, giving it a measure of decision-making power through collective bargaining and legal strikes; the recognition and institutionalization of the union movement. Economic equilibrium was to be accomplished by increasing demand to meet supply, through Fordism (the principle that workers should earn enough to buy the products made with their labor) and welfare (enabling even the unemployed to participate in the economy as buyers). In return for this universalization of the right to consume, the workers would agree to safeguard management profits by increasing their productivity apace with their wages. Capitalism with a human face: everybody happy, busily banking or consuming away (1993:13).

But in an age of speedy telecommunications, just-in-time production processes, third world outsourcing, disposable labor forces and niche markets, this wager between production and consumption no longer holds. Instead, for Masumi, all the things we “happily” associate with leisure time – the home, consumption, pleasure, culture, education – gets pulled into the sphere of labor:

“Culture,” for example, is a source of capital. Even those in the “underclass” are “productive workers” to the extent that they invent new styles that are commodified with lightning speed for “cross-over” audiences. Education has become more and more explicitly a matter of professional training, though often of a nonspecific kind. ...“Leisure” has disappeared....Time spent off the job is dedicated to “self-improvement,” most often oriented toward increasing one’s competitiveness in getting or keeping a job, or improving one’s health to live long enough for a raise. It is just as well that image- value has replaced use-value - people no longer have time to enjoy the fruits of their labor. A state-of-the-art stereo system is more a promise of consumption than its realization. People who have managed to stay employed work harder and harder to buy more and more impressive gadgets that they no longer have time to use (1993:16).

While the modern working man might have been able to escape from the drudgery of modern work by retreating to the interiority of the home, in Masumi’s account of contemporary capitalism dissatisfaction arrives when those protective barriers between inside and outside are dissolved. In short, in the contemporary work

world there is no more distinction between the work place and the home, no more difference between leisure time and punching the clock, no more shopping as a way to relieve one's stress. Instead, everywhere one goes there is only the space of work, work disguised as fun, work disguised as pleasure.

Massumi's immanent account of capitalism forcefully betrays the hope and promise many people assign to so-called postindustrial societies. If, in the modern industrial world, the burden of work required comfy homes and spaces of leisure to combat the stresses of modern capitalism, for many academics post-industrialism was supposed to signal a new phase of work-home relations, as leisure and not work would dominate social life. As Critcher and Bramham write,

During the 1960s, American academics heralded the emergence of post-industrial societies, blessed with rapid technological innovations, high rates of productivity and economic growth. Time devoted to work would decline, career patterns would change and society could look forward to a 'leisure revolution'. Future shock became 'leisure shock'. All societies – capitalist and communist, Western and Eastern – would eventually converge around similar meritocratic occupational structures, identical technological infrastructures and common lifestyles. A future of leisure seemed inescapable (2004:34).

While the shift to a postindustrial society has led to profound changes in the way people experience work and leisure, with many workers seeing labor as a more creative endeavor, the leisure revolution has not come to fruition. On the contrary, as many have shown,¹⁹ instead of decreased work hours, post-industrialism has, in fact, intensified the time spent at work; even more, as new technologies and mobile forms of work allow work to be performed from a wide range of places and at any time of

¹⁹ See for example Schor's *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*.

the day, the home no longer functions as a safety zone that keeps at bay the stressful realities of the workplace.²⁰ As Critcher and Bramham write,

Selling labour power is still at the heart of people's everyday experience of capitalism. Postmodernists may write about how cultural intermediaries skillfully celebrate the aestheticisation of everyday life, as they experience dedifferentiation and the blurring of the boundaries between work and leisure, as workplaces become more leisurely and people 'work out' in their leisure time. But for the majority of workers, dedifferentiation means work time invading the rest of life, eroding the boundaries with family and leisure. The material reality of the 'online society', Sunday and late-night shopping or the 24-hour call centre, means that someone else is working antisocial hours... (2004:37).

As Critcher and Bramham emphasize, in contemporary societies the "purified" distinction between home and work is no longer applicable in a world where mobile work, the 24 hour work day, new forms of telematics technologies and altered forms of consumption allow work to seep into the home. As I will argue, this experience leads to contradictory experiences of home: on the one hand, the ubiquity of work represents a direct threat to the upkeep of the traditional home. Referring to Ulrich Beck's (1999) contention that modern capitalism has led to a series of domestic contradictions, wherein the traditional family home is both enhanced and jeopardized by the equitable logic of capital, Critcher and Bramham write that "[c]hanged attitudes towards cohabitation, marriage, parenting and childcare have transformed generational experience and household composition. The traditional nuclear family, though remaining an aspiration, has proved difficult to sustain (41)." On the other hand, faced with a contemporary social reality that sees the home dispersed across many sites, many attempt to revive the nuclear family as the remedy to social anomie.

²⁰ For example, in *Work and Family in the eWork Era* the authors look at how the increase in eWork relates to the family sphere. While, many workers, especially single mothers, use the flexibility afforded through eWork to enhance their home lives, many people report new kinds of domestic strife, as the need to balance work and home life at times proves untenable.

In “Home as Region,” Theano S. Terkenli, for example locates the return to the traditional family as a widespread response to a political and social climate that rests on a heightened sense of individualism and lack of communal values. “Weakening identification with place and social group in the contemporary Western world,” Terkenli writes “seems to be reducing home to a mere accumulation of habits or to the elaboration of a lifestyle. During the twentieth century Western societies have witnessed a shift from bourgeois notions of home based on themes of interiority, domesticity, and the nuclear family to an individualistic concept of home based on lifestyle gratification” (1995:332). Yet despite these (un)homely trends in living, people still feel the need to use the figure of the home as a way to regain some lost sense of collectivity. “The current, widespread nostalgia for the home and the family,” Terkenli writes, “however they might be construed, becomes all the more poignant, because people find themselves not independently but through other people and institutions” (1995:332).

No Place to Call Home: Work and Home in *Punch Drunk Love* and *Up in the Air*

Released in 2002, Paul Thomas Anderson’s quirky and unpredictable romantic comedy, *Punch Drunk Love*, surprised audiences and critics alike with Adam Sandler’s arresting and eccentric portrayal of Barry Egan, a young man whose masculinity is constantly threatened by an annoying and domineering domestic life. Constantly tormented by his many sisters (they joke about his ‘gayness,’ remind him of embarrassing childhood moments and try to set him up on various blind dates) Egan’s family life, in short, demonstrates how not all domestic spaces are homely, not all interiorities are free from (un)homely social relations. Indeed, as he hopes to escape from this precarious family environment by retreating into a bizarre and lonely work

world, Egan's lack of a social life demonstrates the way the traditional home may very well represent an impossible ideal.

Unlike Sandler's other comedic roles, which often center on a juvenile raucousness, in *Punch Drunk Love* this bawdy behavior was channeled into an energized portrait of a man whose family life is in tatters. Of Egan's many eccentricities (and there are many) perhaps the most interesting involves his line of work. Along with owning a business that supplies Las Vegas hotels with "indestructible" toilet plungers that look like a set of dice, Egan is something of a "consumer genius," who has learned that there are unbounded riches to be found in "airmile promotions" and other consumer loyalty programs. Constantly looking for the "big payoff," a situation where the number of airmiles greatly exceeds the monetary cost of a consumer product, Egan can be found throughout the film ecstatically scoping out supermarkets in search for the next big score.

While the hunt for glitches in consumer loyalty programs plays a large role in personifying Egan's peculiarity, Egan's obsession with airmiles actually becomes an odd and unexpected device for resolving the narrative. When Egan meets Lena Leopard, an executive who spends most of her time in the air, travelling to and from different business meetings, Barry's stock pile of airmiles suddenly takes on new meaning. In short, whereas at the beginning of the story, Egan's reclusive life rested on the pointless accumulation of loyalty rewards, when he begins dating Lena, the rewards become Egan's ticket to a new mobile mode of home. For whereas many romantic films are resolved with the establishment of a normative domestic order, with the female character contained by their domestication, in *Punch Drunk Love* an alternative mode of closure is offered: finding little value in the traditional family

home, Egan and Lena set out to create a more transient idea of home, as the rewards will enable Egan to travel everywhere Lena's work takes her.

Nearly a decade after Anderson released his unique take on the viral reality of consumer loyalty programs, Jason Reitman released *Up in the Air*, an romantic comedy that also centers on the lengths to which some workers will go in order to accumulate a plethora of airmiles. Released in 2009, Reitman's film tells the story of Ryan Bingham, a mobile businessman who is obsessed with collecting a wide range of consumer loyalty rewards - from hotel perks, like speedy check-ins and luxurious upgrades, to his prestigious collection of American Airlines airmiles. However, unlike Barry, who amasses his massive stockpile of airmiles by creatively poaching the airmile industry, Ryan's collection is the legitimate byproduct of his highly mobile job. As the employee of a "job termination" company that specializes in firing the employees of other companies all across the globe, Ryan finds himself in the perfect situation to accumulate travel rewards. Indeed, as one of the new "mobile workers," who spend more time up in the air than grounded in any one place - sleeping in hotels and airports and living out of a suitcase - one might say that Ryan represents the ideal "airmile" customer.

Just as Ryan is on the verge of joining the ten million club - a prestigious title given to a select few who have flown over ten million miles - Bingham's life takes a sudden and devastating turn. Since his boss has decided to ground all of his workers and use a new software program that will allow people to be fired from a distance, Ryan is forced to come to terms with what it means to be grounded, to return to a static and motionless home that will no longer allow him to navigate the globe in a state of transient bliss. In short, Bingham is forced to give up what Agnes Heller calls

the 'temporal home-experience' - a modern experience of the home that involves people who maintain 'geographically promiscuous' (Heller 1995:1) relationships to places.

As films that bring to the forefront the reality of consumer loyalty programs, both *Punch Drunk Love* and *Up in the Air* obviously share similar themes and unique plot developments. However, the affinities between these films do not end here. As I will argue, both films use loyalty programs to offer interesting and poignant insights into the changing nature of work, consumption, trust and intimacy. Just as Massumi argues that under late capitalism the dichotomies of work and play converge, making it impossible for workers to retreat from the hardships of work, both films show how changing technological systems and work habits create new environments that alter the status and containment of the home. That is, in both films the ubiquitous reality of work and motility causes the main protagonists to reject the traditional domestic sphere. Furthermore, as romantic comedies, both films use the romance plot to look at how the loss of home is tied to questions of intimacy. For if the home is traditionally considered the principal site of trust and intimacy – a moral universe as Noel Carroll writes - what happens when this domestic interior is threatened or undermined by work conditions? As we will see, both films suggest that in a contemporary world, where firing workers is a task delegated to strangers, sex is purchased through the telephone and loyalty depends on the amount you spend on a specific brand, domestic closeness and physical intimacy may be all but lost.

The Home as Moral Center

In his book *The System of Objects* Jean Baudrillard provides a semiotic exploration of the way the home is rendered meaningful through various decorations,

furnishings and interior design. Building on earlier semiotic models, like the ideological analysis of Roland Barthes, Baudrillard's concern is to show how, under modernity, the home has been disenchanted, transformed by a cultural process that sees all everyday objects overpowered by commodification. In short, for Baudrillard, with the coming of modernity, with its range of new technologies, mass produced products and abstract semiotic codes, the traditional home's role in maintaining normative social norms is undermined.

In the first part of the book Baudrillard describes what he calls a 'traditional approach to the home.' This traditional home is one in which patriarchal authority and unification dominate, as each space in the home is arranged in order to bring the family unit together, to create a moral economy in which the different parts of the home - rooms, furniture and decoration - function as symbols of the family's coherence and structure. As such, the traditional home is one built around stasis and immobility. Baudrillard writes,

The arrangement of furniture offers a faithful image of the familial and social structures of a period. The typical bourgeois interior is patriarchal...Although it is diversified with respect to function, the furniture is highly integrated, centering around the sideboard or the bed in the middle of the room. There is a tendency to accumulate, to fill and close off the space. The emphasis is on unfunctionality, immovability, imposing presence and hierarchical labeling. Each room has a strictly defined role corresponding to one or another of the various functions of the family unit, and each ultimately refers to a view which conceives of the individual as a balanced assemblage of distinct faculties. The pieces of furniture confront one another, jostle one another, and implicate one another in a unity that is not so much spatial as moral in character. They are arranged about an axis which ensures a regular chronology of actions; thanks to this permanent symbolization, the family is always present to itself. Within this private space each piece of furniture in turn, and each room, internalizes its own particular function and takes on the symbolic dignity pertaining to it - then the whole house puts the finishing touch to this integration of interpersonal relationships within the semi-hermetic family group (2005:13)

In contrast to the modern home's abstract and impersonal furnishings and interior design (the home is not passed on from generation to generation but is a commodity purchased in the marketplace), traditional homes are deeply sentimental and affective, as they represent a passageway to previous generations. A classic example of the generational and affective function of traditional domestic objects involves antiques, such as a grandfather clock. In the traditional home, the function of an object, like an antique, has nothing to do with its "ambience" or practicality, or the way it confers status to the home, but rather, according to Baudrillard, has everything to do with legacy and chronology, with the way it maintains the home's historical continuity:

All this constitutes an organism whose structure is the patriarchal relationship founded on tradition and authority, and whose heart is the complex affective relationship that binds all the family members together. Such a home is a specific space which takes little account of any objective decorative requirements, because the primary function of furniture and objects here is to personify human relationships, to fill the space that they share between them, and to be inhabited by a soul. The real dimension they occupy is captive to the moral dimension which it is their job to 'They have as little autonomy in this space as the various Family members enjoy in society. Human beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the objects take on a certain density, an emotional value- what might be called a 'presence'. What gives the houses of our childhood such depth and resonance in memory is clearly this complex structure of interiority, and the objects within it serve for us as boundary markers of the symbolic configuration known as home. The caesura between inside and outside, and their formal opposition, which falls under the social sign of property and the psychological sign of the immanence of the family, make this traditional space into a closed transcendence (2005:13,14).

In Baudrillard's conception of the traditional home, then, domestic space becomes transcendental; it comes to possess a presence and soul. It is the space of favorable childhood memories, a time when the home was more than just a collection of things, but was the heart of the family and its social order, its protective inside. According to Baudrillard, with the emergence of mass production and the consumer

society however the status of the traditional family home changes, as it loses its soul and becomes the site of disenchanted objects. For unlike the traditional home, which centers around the signs of interiority, where sentimentality, history, and affective relationships create family cohesion, the modern home is deeply externalized, its chief logic determined by outside codes that rests on functionality, mass production, ambience and new technological gadgets.

The decline of the traditional home is particularly evident with the rise of the technological gadget. In contrast to the antique, the gadget is the essential modern object, a domestic thing that co-joins a stern functionalism (the object must perform some practical activity) with the imaginary or hyper-real function of affirming our belief in the progressive world of technology. So while the traditional home filled its spaces with “humanity,” for Baudrillard modern gadgets transform the home into a junk-space of useless machines, as the closed spaces of the home comes to rely on the open spaces of the market (Lane, 2000: 32-35).

At times Baudrillard’s description of the traditional home veers into excessive nostalgia; however, the real reason I have brought up this material on the semiotic function of the home is that one of the most striking things about the domestic sphere in *Punch Drunk Love* and *Up In The Air* is its total absence. That is, not only are domestic places rarely shown in these films, but in the scarce moments in which we actually glimpse inside the homes of Egan and Bingham what we encounter is neither some intimate haven of human warmth nor even domestic signs of modern progress. Instead the home in both films is pictured as a lonely, extinct space that barely resembles the figure of home. Thus, if the meaning of either the modern or the traditional home is conveyed through the presence of various domestic objects -

family pictures, technologies, decorations - in both films the plentitude of the home will be depleted to the point of its disappearance into blank sparseness.

This image of the lonely, sparse home is particularly apt with respect to Bingham's apartment. While his apartment building bears the ironic title "Mansion House," Bingham's actual home is more like a tiny closet or a storage space. Containing only the most minimal of modern conveniences (the apartment has a bed, fridge, stove, closet and a microwave) Bingham's sparse and minimalistic apartment perfectly reflects his transient work and social life. Indeed, given that he is constantly absent from the home, it is little wonder that Bingham's domestic sphere lacks that 'lived-in feeling' that would suggest even a basic level of human care or attention. Unlike his sister's home, which is rich in detail and warmth, Bingham's abode bears no traces of the human relationships Baudrillard discusses in terms of the traditional home. There are no sentimental pictures on the walls, no knickknacks or souvenirs laying around to reflect his international travel, nothing to suggest that this home has any significant human contact. In short, in place of the home's status as the ground for developing social relations, the home is for Bingham a mere stopover space, a momentary resting place within a world of perpetual motility.

While not as sparse and minimalistic as Bingham's 'Mansion House,' Egan's home is equally depicted as a lonely place that hardly conjures up those homely creature comforts and human forms of intimacy representative of the traditional home. Again, just as the emptiness of Bingham's home is contrasted to the plentitude of his sister's home, the solitude of Egan's home is also depicted through a quick glimpse into the lively spaces of his sister's home. Primarily seen in the "birthday party" scene – a short scene where Egan attends a large and lively family gathering –

the sister's home is nothing short of a site of maternal plentitude, a warm, raucous environment where women simply rule the roost.

There are two artifacts in the "birthday party scene" - a large dinner table and a china hutch - that stand out as emblems of Baudrillard's traditional home, especially its status as a site of social continuity and human relationships. Regarding the first object what is most striking is its massive size. Capable of seating over fifteen people, the enormous table, which during the scene often fills the entire frame, acts as a domineering emblem of the home's plentitude, its domestic function as the solidifier of the family unit, as the horizontal structure comes to stand in for the accumulation and extension of the family in a given space. But while the dinner table can be viewed horizontally, as an object that orders the family in space, the china hutch can be viewed vertically, as a furnishing that evokes the register of time. As a piece of furniture that is designed to display the family's "special china," the hutch not only marks the social standing of the family (whether or not the family has a "valuable" collection or not) but offers a passage into the past, as the furniture usually functions more as a collector's item that is passed on to later generations.

In contrast to these "homely" artifacts, Egan's apartment is quite simply a home built for one. Unlike the sister's massive table, which is designed to accommodate many, and her fine china, which is designed to preserve the passage of time, the objects in Egan's home represent decorations that follow a minimalistic logic, befitting his lonely and dislocated life style. In the telephone sex scene, a brief sequence in which Egan has phone sex while sitting at the table, the solitary nature of Egan is succinctly presented through various spatially disjointed shots of his dinner table. While he actually possesses a fairly large table, somehow Egan's social life

constantly feels disproportionate to the object's plentitude, as if the table were far too big for Egan's apartment. This disproportionality is evidenced through a quick juxtaposition in images of Egan while he sits at the table. In the first shot we are presented with a wide shot of Egan at the table (potential plentitude). Then the camera turns to a confining close up shot of Egan (isolation), a shift in perspective that cuts off the viewer's previous focal point. The effect not only demonstrates the absurdity of the table's size (the table simply takes up unnecessary space) but it also highlights Barry's social isolation, as he is pictured as disproportionately occupying his own domestic space. In short, the table is too big for Egan, too large for someone who lives an isolated, reclusive home life.

Rejection of the Family Home

For both Bingham and Egan the home's status as the place of intimate human interaction is openly rejected. If the home is supposed to be, as Shonfeild shows, a protective sphere that buffers out the noise and hardships of the workplace, for both protagonists' work is all that there is, and as such they find no solace or refuge in the domestic sphere. Indeed, instead of relying on their respective families for moral support, both characters despise their domestic roots, seeing the family home, not as the deep and complex space of happy childhood memories, but as an intrusive force that must be excised from their lives.

In the case of Egan, this disavowal is downright violent. During the "birthday party" scene, for example, the domineering nature of his sisters (throughout they tease him about his eccentricities and his "gayness") pushes Egan's already socially awkward personality over the edge, as he transforms the everyday world of family gatherings into a pathological encounter with the (un)homely. As the family prepares to be

seated, Egan unexpectedly breaks out in a violent rage, smashing up a series of glass doors.²¹ Here, in a flash of aggression, Egan's behavior draws into question the traditional home's patriarchal order and coherence, as his outpouring of domestic violence highlights the fact that sometimes the most dangerous things threatening the family come from within.

While not as violent as Egan, Bingham rejects the family unit in a way that is just as pathological. A self-professed loner, who has consciously decided not to marry and goes through relationships like the disposable hotel toiletries he collects on his numerous business trips, Bingham embodies the freedom of anti-domesticity. Promoting a personal philosophy that sees family life as a stagnant straightjacket that hinders the individual – Bingham's 'no home rules' attitude not only represents a personal life style, but is the basis of an entrepreneurial twist: as the creator and promoter of the "What's in Your Backpack" philosophy, a self-improvement program that helps people rid their lives of unnecessary connections, relationships and responsibilities, Bingham's philosophical attitude towards detachment and mobility constitutes one of the key ways he makes a living.

As a member of a circuit of guest speakers, who give motivational lectures at airports and hotels, Bingham's mobile job provides him the perfect chance to really practice what he preaches: constantly on the move, living out of suitcases, unmoored from any specific location, dining on airport food, Bingham is quite simply an expert

²¹ On several occasion in the film the viewer is presented with unforeseen acts of violence. In one scene Egan is shown looking down a street; seconds later a devastating car crash occurs; in this scene neither Egan or the viewer is able to anticipate the crash. Rather the accident appears almost out of nowhere, as though it existed in another time and space; here I believe Anderson's interest in unpredictable violence speaks to the way in a world of technological dislocation the subject experience a dramatic shift in perspective, wherein one's locality no longer guarantees epistemological certainty.

in mobile living. Whether or not his philosophy stems from his work experience or whether his work is a materialization of his philosophy is not known; either way what is clear is that both Bingham's work life and motivational philosophy are based on an approach that cherishes the temporary over the permanent, mobility over stasis and lightness over solidity. As Bingham declares at the beginning of one of his seminars:

This is how I start every day of my life... imagine that you have been given a new backpack. Now begin to fill this backpack with people, casual acquaintances, friends of friends, people around the office; and then you move on to the people that you trust with your innermost secrets, your cousins, your aunts and uncles, your brothers and sisters, your parents; and finally your husband or wife, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, fill them all into your backpack...now begin to feel the weight of that backpack. Make no mistake your relationships are the heaviest components in your life. Feel the straps cutting into your shoulders. All those negotiations, arguments, secrets and compromises. Do we need to carry all that weight? Set that bag down. Some animals were built to carry each other, they live symbiotically for a life time, star crossed lovers, monogamous swans. We are not those animals. The slower we move the faster we die. We are not swans. We're sharks.

In a way the entire narrative trajectory of *Up in the Air* can be seen as a testing ground for determining just how far Bingham can take his 'backpack philosophy.' How light can Bingham make his life? Just how much stuff - relationships, compromises, secrets - can he discard from his backpack? Is there a firm limit to how much he can carry? Is there a set speed he should move before becoming weighed down? Indeed, while the end of the film suggests that maybe we are not all sharks, Bingham certainly begins under the assumption that less is always more. Less hassle, fewer relationships, no secrets - in short, less family is Bingham's remedy for being bogged down with the strife and failure of connecting. However, such a task requires a certain understanding of speed. "The slower we move the faster we die," is Bingham's philosophy in a nutshell - a message that could be just as much about the

rapid flows of modern capital, migration and technology as it is about Bingham's rapid movement away from human contact.

Airmiles Promotions and Consumptions as a New source of Labor

I began this chapter with the idea that the home has often been considered the prime space for consumption, the private sphere where the consumption of products provides the reward for engaging in the workforce. According to Hirsch and Silverstone, however, the household is not only the key site of private consumption, but maintains the role of moral economy – a domesticated structure of meaning that influences how commodities are perceived, used and subject to meaning. In this way, the meaning of consumption depends on a domestic filter, as commodities come to possess different meanings according to the households they enter and in which circulate. As they write,

The household is a moral economy because the economic activities of its members within the household and in the wider world of work, leisure and shopping are defined and informed by a set of cognitions, evaluations and aesthetics, which are themselves defined and informed by the histories, biographies and politics of the household and its members. These are expressed in the specific and various cosmologies and rituals that define, or fail to define, the household's integrity as a social and cultural unit (1992:16).

Following de Certeau's lead in insisting that meaning – especially the meaning of the commodity - is always subject to the rituals and practices of the everyday world, Hirsch and Silverstone's notion of the moral economy seeks to uncover what Kopytoff (1986) calls the 'biographies of things,' the way everyday objects are given meaning through the way they move through different places, especially the domestic sphere. But if the home is considered the operative space that gives meaning to consumption, what happens when the home is in fragile tatters, as is the case in both *Punch Drunk Love* and *Up in the Air*? What happens to this moral economy when the

divide between work and home is strained and when work becomes the main site of social interaction and communication?

In the next section I will explore this question of the home as principal site of consumption in terms of how each film treats the ubiquitous reality of loyalty reward programs, like airmiles. As mentioned earlier, one of the most interesting and unique aspects about both films is how they utilize the act of collecting airmiles points to offer claims about how loyalty, intimacy and space are altered in contemporary societies. Two aspects of the act of airmiles collection will be considered: in the first I will explore how the obsession each protagonist has with collecting loyalty rewards represents a breakdown in the division between the spaces of the home and the spaces of work. Second I will consider how loyalty programs attempt to forge a kind of commercial bond between consumer and the product, becoming a kind of faux hospitality.

While loyalty reward programs, like frequent flyer programs, have been around since the 1980s, the ways in which one is rewarded for supporting a particular product or brand have changed. Indeed, while one might think that the idea behind such loyalty program has remained constant (by offering reward gifts that can be used towards the purchase of other products, loyalty programs encourage consumers to stick with the same products or brands) the actual perception and utilization of these programs has differed greatly over the past few decades. While it is not my intent to go into the marketing research on the perceived and utilized value of such programs, one of the most striking aspects about loyalty programs evidenced in both films involves the ways in which consumption becomes a kind of work. That is, rather than seeing the collection of airmiles as a leisurely act, through which one is rewarded with a

pleasurable gift, both films explore how consumption cannot be separated from the sphere of work.

Just as Massumi argues that, in contemporary societies, leisure time has been colonized by the space of work, so loyalty reward programs have become more than just about consumer perks or gifts, but, as a kind of currency, have come to act like work incentives. In their article, “The Ethical Dimensions Of Airline Frequent Flier Programs,” for example, Arnesen, Fleechnor and Toh report how for many business executives air travel has become an integral way by which many can increase their airmiles portfolios. In their research they have even found that many workers will even put in additional time to ensure that they maximize their portfolios, often doing extra travel research, booking convoluted itineraries or taking additional flights just to get more airmiles. These calculated means of attaining airmiles even lead to the need for specialized airmiles brokers that help facilitate the trade and exchange of airmiles (Liston-Heyes).

In *Punch Drunk Love* Egan is presented as one of these new “airmiles” workers. Indeed, while Egan possess a legitimate job, throughout the film he is shown spending most of his time surveying the aisles of supermarkets and sorting through myriads of household advertisements in search of one of those lucrative offers by which the number of airmiles received for a product far exceeds the monetary value of the purchase. One of these lucrative promotions is presented at the beginning of the film, when we learn that Egan has discovered a “Healthy Choice” offer that has the potential to make Egan quite wealthy.

If consumption – especially the purchase of household products – is an act relegated to the private sphere, in these supermarket scenes Egan adds new meaning

to the idea that shopping for the home is a form of unpaid labor. Indeed, instead of envisioning consumption as a domestic duty, where consumption is either a pleasurable reward for a hard day's work or a job that provides sustenance and support for the family, the film shows Egan's shopping to be a kind of work in itself. More precisely, shopping is, for Egan, a pleasurable form of work. During the supermarket scene, for example, what is most striking is not only the way the supermarket is imbued with intense colors, as the piles of mass produced products take on a magical lure, but Egan's ecstatic reaction to these products. As he frantically moves through the supermarket aisles, Egan's shopping experiences borders on the orgiastic, as if the endless rows of merchandise provided the sensual pleasures he were not able to attain from others.

But, while Egan clearly takes pleasure in consumption, his joy has nothing to do with the actual physicality of the product. Rather, Egan's consumption habits are informatic: that is, by evaluating products in terms of their exchange value, Egan's buying strategy focuses on the product's reduction to numerical data. Circulation here is paramount, as Egan concentrates on how he can transport an everyday domestic product, like pudding, into an abstract value of exchangeability. Indeed, for Barry neither the pudding nor the air-miles have any intrinsic value. Barry does not, after all, plan to consume the pudding or even use the air-miles to go on a trip. On the contrary, the value of the gifts remains in a virtual state, indefinitely waiting to be transformed into some other product.

While the ubiquity of loyalty programs opens up a new employment opportunity for Egan, who manages to transform the simple domestic chore of grocery shopping into a lucrative business based on alternative currencies, for

Bingham the obsession with accumulating airmiles is more sociological than economic: as a business traveller, who spends more time in hotels than at home, Bingham wears the endless airline and hotel perks he accumulates as badges of upward social mobility, as if the endless number of program cards he owned were a sign of his self-importance. The way in which a life of transience and international motility becomes a sign of distinction and social exclusivity is evident in Bingham's goal of joining the million mile club – a prestigious status offered to American Airline customers who have flown over ten million miles. Boasting that when he attains this status he will belong to a select group that is rarer than even those who have walked on the moon, Bingham's obsession with being the most transient man on the planet offers an interesting look at how distinction in contemporary societies is not simply tied to the accumulation of wealth or the ability to maintain a distinguished home (think of all those realty TV shows, like "Cribs," where the rich and wealthy showcase their well-fortified mansions), but also has to do with the subject's ability to easefully access a network of international destinations, to maintain a transient existence, unmoored from any given place and any given time. We find, here, a perverse reversal of the social injustice traditionally associated with transient groups - from the uprootedness of the urban homeless to the precarious experience of the global diaspora – where motility is a kind of social sin. For if being forced to move is one of the exemplary (un)homely modern experiences, here movement is transferred to a sign of absolute privilege.

Yet while the reward programs provide Bingham with a sense of social distinction, the privilege of being 'geographically promiscuous' does not offer him with any unique, cultural experiences. It is not as if his position of privilege gives him

access to a world of cultural difference or a new perspective on the uniqueness of different places. Bingham, after all, does not use the airmiles to take an exotic vacation, a journey that might take him out of his comfort zone. Instead, Bingham suffers from the same complex that besets Marc Auge's fictional international traveller – Pierre Dupont, a character whose journey through the contemporary non-place is described as a pleasant and frictionless experience that depends on cultural homogeneity.

In the prologue of *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* Auge describes the ubiquitous ritual of travelling to some international destination: on the day of his journey Dupont takes a taxi to the airport, takes some cash out of a ATM machine, presents his boarding pass to a flight attendant, passes through security, purchase a few luxury items at a duty free shop, boards his plane, and then settles into his flight by reading one of those trendy airline magazines. The description is so mundane that it is easy to lose sight of its meaning: for Auge what is at the heart of all these movements and passages – from swiping your debit card to receive money to swiping your passport to clear customs – is a homogenous zone of formal interactions, wherein the subject is trained and expected to navigate a series of spaces that are identical to each other. The key to the non-place is the way the same formal codes (“swipe your card here”) make travel easy, fluid and efficient. In other words, Auge's opening tale could be the scene out of any traveler's experience of the non-place.

Like Dupont, Bingham's travel habits take us deep into the non-place. But unlike Auge, who is highly critical of the way the infrastructure required to facilitate the flow of global cultures reduces spaces to the same cultural experiences, Bingham

actually desires these space, finds comfort in the ease and efficiency of moving through the formalized rituals of air travel. Indeed, when Bingham is asked to escort a colleague, Natalie, on a series of business trips, the viewer is invited to consider how Bingham's prowess in navigating the non-place gives him an advantage over more regular travellers.

As an ordinary, everyday traveller, Natalie's habits and approach to navigating the non-place is for Bingham unbearably pedestrian. Everything about the way she moves is far too slow and tedious: she carries the wrong kind of luggage, is unlearned in the right way to line up for the security check, and doesn't possess any of the right loyalty perks to ensure a speedy hotel check-in. In direct opposition to this slow approach to travel, Bingham is a self-professed non-place expert: he knows exactly how to pack, has all the right perks to make travel light and easy. He even claims to know which line ups are the quickest, using a technique Natalie calls racist (Bingham professes that you should always enter the line that has the most Asian people). Here Bingham's reliance on crude stereotypes I think provides the perfect metaphor for the appeal of such loyalty programs: providing him the right tools to access the non-place efficiently, Bingham's mobile life is designed to reduce the complexity of living.

In a way, Bingham's bag pack philosophy is the perfect complement to the non-place. As Auge argues, the whole experience of the non-place rests on the implementation of simple codes or rules that are not rooted in any historical or cultural complex – boarding a plane in LAX is the same as boarding a plane in Paris – but depends on simple formal rules that enable or prevent people from accessing different spaces. For Bingham this world of simplicity is home: possessing neither the friction of complex social relationships, nor the variability and heterogeneity of

geographic difference, Bingham's pursuit of living light, his reduction of situations to "stereotypes" exemplifies the way espousing simple rules can offset complex behavior.

Are you ready for an Intimate Affair? – Intimacy and the Home at a Distance

In the preceding section I showed how the domestic home forms a kind of social and supportive container enabling intimacy and human relatedness. Despite this "supportive" role, however, both Egan and Bingham opt for a minimalistic home life, rejecting the family sphere and its status as a refuge from the stress of contemporary work. In this next section I wish to analyze this rejection of the home in terms of the issue of intimacy, with particular attention to the ways in which technological changes to the home and the workplace lead to the creation of new modes of contact. After all, as romantic comedies, which traditionally work towards that most predictable space of heterosexual communion, both films cannot escape the tropes of love and lust, or the desire to arrive home in the arms of a woman. Yet while this narrative form is far from novel, what is interesting about the romantic plots in both films is how the eccentric work habits and (un)homely spaces of both men provide a gripping look at how trust, affection and intimacy no longer depend on physical closeness; rather the question both films explore is: how do we define intimacy experienced from a distance? What role does the home play when human affection is experienced on the move?

According to Gaston Bachelard (1994) the home is the primary space of human affection, closeness, poetry, imagination and proximity; in short the home is the container of peaceful intimacy, a geometrical structure that defies its "rational and abstract" qualities by becoming more than just a protective shell consisting of angles, surfaces and structure. On the contrary, the home is an affectionate and magical space

that caringly envelops people, allowing them to make essential and creative connections to places, people and things. “If I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house,” Bachelard writes, “I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (1994:6).

If the (un)homely is a space of dislocation, where one does not have the freedom to dream peacefully, the home is, for Bachelard, a space of attachment, a place where close and physical contact forges new kinds of imaginative bonds. But while Bachelard provides a captivating and lyrical account of how the home provides humans with close and intimate contact with their surroundings, for many contemporary critics the sanctuary of the home has been replaced by an (un)homely world of social and spatial fragmentation. Whether we are referring to Marc Augé’s notion of the non-place, David Harvey’s concept of space-time compression or Paul Virilio notion of dromology (to mention but a few) the experience of postmodern space often rests more on dispersal, fragmentation and distance than intimate proximity.

The case of Virilio is particularly revealing. Commenting on the way the act of belonging to a geographic place (the home at large) has been disrupted through the process of deterritorialization, Virilio writes: “We have become deterritorialized. Our embedding in our native soil, that element of *hic et nunc*, (here and now), “*in situ*,” that embedding belongs, now, in a certain way, to the past. It has been overtaken by the acceleration of history, by the acceleration of reality itself, by “real time,” and by the “live,” all of which are in a stage beyond the *hic et nunc*, “*in situ*” condition. Caught as we are between this territory-based embedding, which is of a geographic,

geophysical nature, or even of a geostrategic nature in the case of the military, and total deterritorialization, what remains in order to interpret our world?" (Armitage:17).

Do we not find in Virilio's understanding of deterritorialization a more sophisticated summation of Bingham's 'backback philosophy'? To live well, Bingham boasts, one must pack light. To live well, one must be able to move swiftly. It all comes back to the question of speed. For Virilio we are moving so fast that our acceleration makes it impossible to remain embedded in our native soil. But who would want to remain tied down to a place and to a certain time period? This is Bingham's response, as intimacy, for him, is only acceptable if it is brief and made transient - contact as a kind of speed-dating. But if, for both Virilio and Bingham, speed is an inherent facet of contemporary life, is intimacy still possible? For does not intimacy require a certain amount of time and space to make those personable and embodied connections fundamental to the act of bonding?

According to Christian Licoppe and Jean-Philippe Hourtin, the way in which we use new technologies has had a profound effect on how we confront each other intimately, and especially how context and background information are used to communicate with others at a distance. Focusing their research around the rise of mobile communication devices, such as the ubiquitous cellphone, Licoppe and Hourtin frame their ideas on the spatial transformations affecting contemporary societies in terms of Giddens's understanding of trust. According to Giddens, distant modes of communications, like the use of the traditional telephone, require a constant use of trust to make contact successful and meaningful. In other words, since communication is no longer a matter of physical proximity, there is the constant need

to ensure that the other is trustworthy, to ensure that the distance between interlocutors does not lead to deception. As they write,

Giddens (1990) argued that one core feature of modernity was the de-institutionalization of personal bonds, whether between spouses or among family or friends. At a personal level, trust, which asks for the opening of one individual to the other, becomes a project on which the involved parties must work. When it is not controlled by normative codes or stabilized rituals, trust must be won by providing tokens of openness, willingness, emotion and commitment. Trust is not therefore a stable category but is constructed as a process, and the bonds it supports become reflexive projects, always open to a revision of the conventions that sustain them. From the de-institutionalization of personal bonds is born the necessity repeatedly to display trust towards one another. The cellular phone thus appears to be a potent resource of modernity. By following people around, it disconnects the automatic reference of its user to a specific context. But the proper management of phone interactions requires its users to provide at least some edited information about their context” (2002:107).

Following Giddens, Licoppe and Hourtin contend that trust is not a given in contemporary social interactions, but a process that must be made and remade according to new contexts, new channels of information and new social norms. This is especially true in the context of the “absence presence” of telecommunication devices, such as cellphones and other mobile devices. Since mobile communications involve a de-localization of communicative space, where the interlocutors can never be sure of the others’ whereabouts, new kinds of negotiations are required that ensure that trustworthiness and intimacy are valid and true. As Caron and Caronia write,

In a socio-economic context in which travel is frequent and people take portable, mobile new technologies with them, more and more places become potential locations for communications. Space begins to move, and the “where” loses the immobility of a specific location to become a sort of aura that accompanies the user. ...In such “moving spaces,” we are caught unprepared, and while we may know whom we want to contact, we no longer know where we are contacting them. Since we are less able to tell in advance where our interlocutor is located, the new stock beginning for telephone calls has become “Where are you?” (2007:16, 17).

To contextualize this process of delocalization we can return to the main thesis offered by Erving Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*: As Erving Goffman states:

...when an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. They will be interested in his general socio-economic status, his conception of self, his attitude toward them, his competence, his *trustworthiness*, (emphasis added) etc. Although some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself, there are usually quite practical reasons for acquiring it. Information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him (1959:1)

Implicit in Goffman's conception of face to face communication is the idea that during a conversation not only is oral information exchanged between interlocutors, but all kinds of other inferential data is collected - the interlocutor's identity, his or her desires or motivations, matters of trust – that depends on the interlocutors' bodily (co)presence. As Goffman continues to argue, in every social interaction the situation is marked by two kinds of signs: the expressions the subject gives and the expressions the subject gives off. Whereas the former refers to the conscious and intended messages a subject gives during a verbal conversation, the latter refers to all the non-verbal signs that are picked up and deciphered during the exchange. Quite often these unintentional non-verbal signs can contradict what occurs during the verbal performance, and provide a more nuanced picture of what is actually being sent during the communicative exchange. Subsequently, while a subject may claim to have done something, his/her bodily actions may create doubts about their truthfulness or trustworthiness.

A pertinent question raised in both films is: what happens to the communicative exchange when bodily co-presence is absent? How do people

determine the validity and trustworthiness of others when the situation no longer provides the interlocutors with both kinds of signs? Discussing the mobile phone and its elimination of the social context common to face to face encounters, Licoppe and Hourtin write:

 this essential feature of the mobile phone is a two-sided coin. On the one hand, when calling or being called by a mobile phone user, one has no a priori indication of the spatial and social context of the mobile phone user. But some information about context is a prerequisite for the creation of the trust necessary for a proper distant interaction. Somewhat paradoxically, the de-localization, which is an essential property of wireless technologies, calls for re-localization. Mobile phone users must explicitly provide some kind of information (whether spontaneously in the course of the talk, or by answering a direct question about their whereabouts)” (2002:101).

But though delocalization requires communicators to seek out contextual information about the situation, Licoppe and Hourtin insist that, since no level of re-localization can provide all the details required to make an absolute claim about the trustworthiness of others, all distant communications involves risk and uncertainty:

 Risk is linked to the impossibility of assigning a spatial reference to the mobile phone user. It is a risk because knowing where your correspondent is, at least approximately, constitutes background information that helps the management of the interaction... As Giddens (1990) suggests, distant coordination requires trust on the part of participants and trust in human and material intermediaries that make the distant interaction a success. Conversely, interaction with a participant whose every activity is visible does not require explicit trust in intermediaries. Trust becomes more of an issue as contextual information disappears because of various forms of time, space and remoteness. Because mobile phone users are disconnected from their space context in the eyes of the second party, the use of the mobile phone specially puts the interaction at risk. Mutual trust in what constitutes a proper and successful call has to be restored and explicit gauges given. Many polite solutions involve making explicit some information about where one is, i.e. describing where one is (2002: 100).

While Licoppe and Hourtin’s reading of spatial dislocation is framed within the context of mobile communications, their understanding of the problems of intimacy and contact are evident throughout *Punch Drunk Love*, especially during the “phone sex” scene. In this scene the isolated and automated nature of Egan’s work

will be tied to the issues of physical intimacy, as his experience with a phone sex worker will personify Egan's overall dislocation and lack of social contact. As mentioned, distant communication requires new ways of determining trust. However, in the "phone sex" scene the viewer is presented with a flabbergasted Egan, whose inability to attain the right contextual information leads to a (un)homely encounter with risky world of de-localization.

Throughout the phone sex scene Egan's apprehension about intimacy centers around his spatial dislocation: while he is contained in the privacy and intimacy of the home, the spatial whereabouts and context of his sexual partner remain inexplicable. Is Georgia really, as the seductive voice on the telephone continually self-professes, lying naked in her bedroom? Does she really have blonde hair? Is she really from Los Angeles? Egan, of course, has no way of knowing. Given only a telephone voice, the context of Georgia's situation – her appearance, whereabouts, attire – can only be accessed through a distanced presence. Indeed, as the viewer comes to learn a little later, the sexy Georgia is not located in her Los Angeles home but only "plays" Georgia from the inside of a rather mundane office somewhere in Utah.

Just as in a previous scene Egan is shown to mistrust an airmiles promotion,²² throughout these scenes the problem of pinpointing the exact whereabouts of Georgia consumes Egan to the point that the demand to locate the caller takes precedence over his sexual pleasure. At one point Georgia asks: "Are you horny, are you stroking it yet?" Perpetually awkward, Egan replies: "No, No I'm not!" And in a tone of self-defeat - "I don't know what it (his privates) is doing?" It is as though Egan were

²² In this scene Egan is shown arguing with an "airmiles" agent about a potential error in one of their ads. The ad, Egan declares, must be a mistake, since the rewards far exceed the cost of the products purchased. And while the agent is adamant about the advertisement's truthfulness, Egan appears unconvinced.

unable to “play” into the game of sexual fantasy, to forget that the expressions she gives off cannot be verified or trusted. Instead, Egan is preoccupied with the space of the call: “Where are you located?” he asks. Discovering that the stranger is actually a local, he then boasts, “Wow I’m in Los Angeles too” – as if being in the same city somehow made the “date” more legitimate or important. Yet Egan enthusiasm quickly wanes. As if suddenly awakened to the reality that everything Georgia says could be a lie, Egan becomes slightly unruly, refusing to play into the seduction game. “Do you want to know what I am doing? Do you want to know what I look like?” she asks. But even before she can get pass the clichéd, “I’m 5 foot 2...” Egan interjects: “It doesn’t matter. None of this matters, since I have no way of knowing that anything you say is true.”

For Egan this night of dispassionate love-making becomes a quick lesson in mistrust: when Egan wakes the next day he is interrupted by an early morning call. Surprised to hear Georgia on the other end of the line, Egan remains cordial, feigning all the social niceties expected from an intimate call; yet things quickly become too personal for Egan when Georgia asks to borrow some money. Indeed, when Egan refuses to help Georgia out, all of the social niceties witnessed thus far are immediately set aside and the real exploitive reasons for the call are revealed. Giving voice to the ever present anxiety over identity theft, Georgia replies, “I have all your information, Barry, your credit card number, your social insurance number...”

Egan, in the end, hangs up the phone and proceeds to immediately cancel his credit card. But this just makes matters worse. When the Mattress Man - the head honcho of the Utah operation – hears about Egan’s reluctance to fork over the cash, he has his goons set off for Los Angeles in order extort the money from Barry

through a much more palpable and violent means. But when the gang puts Egan's date in the hospital, the situation elevates to the point of absurdity. Spontaneously setting off to Utah, Egan decides that what is truly needed in these kinds of situations is a return to the face to face encounter - as if the only solution to the problem of intimacy was a good old showdown between men. And so Egan shows up at the Matresses Man's store, demanding that he put an end to the attacks or in the words of Egan "I'll smash the hell of you." What then proceeds is an exercise in Goffman's "signs of expression" as each man engages in a communicative tug of war, attempting to read the other and determine which one actually means what they say. Here, it seems, the road back to trust is found in a return to the physicality of the face to face encounter, as if being in the same place were the only way in which trust could ever be found.

Like *Punch Drunk Love*, *Up in the Air* also explores how trust and intimacy are intertwined with contemporary changes to the workplace. As a self-exiled workaholic, whose job prevents him from remaining immobile, Bingham sees intimacy as always intimacy at or from a distance. It isn't that Bingham is unable to express his feelings or sexual desires like Egan; rather Bingham's intimate life is stunted because he is always on the move, treating his relationships like the disposable hotel products he encounters through his work trips.

Bingham's life of intimate quick-fixes, however, changes when he meets Alex, a like-minded business woman, who appears to have also abandoned a life of domestic duty to dedicate herself to work and travel. For the elusive and fleeting world traveller Bingham, Alex appears to be the perfect mate: unlike Egan, who is unable to trust Georgia and get pass the de-contextualized nature of their conversation, Bingham and

Alex revel in their status as strangers, the fact that neither can ever be sure of the other's whereabouts. In one scene, the two even find sexual fulfillment in their spatial dislocation, as they use their cellphones to engage in an quick game of "sexting" – a form of phone sex where seductive text messages are passed back and forth between the two lovers while they lay in different hotel rooms in different cities. Here, the act of "sexting" provides an apt metaphor for their entire approach to intimacy: unhindered by space, free from any specific context, their intimate relationship is one that can be made from anywhere and at any time.

If for Giddens modernity represents the depersonalization of intimate bonds, where the need to constantly renegotiate modes of trustworthiness is paramount, Bingham evokes a world where there is neither the need nor desire to eradicate the instability of maintaining trust. This is most poignantly revealed through Bingham's job as a modern white-collar mercenary who does the nasty work of firing complete strangers. Like the faux hospitality produced through his travel awards, Bingham's entire approach to letting employees go rests on a sophisticated and glossy game of corporate charades, as he provides his victims with disingenuous speeches about chasing after their dreams and how "everyone who has achieved anything great has been in the exact position you are now in." While the viewer may be taken in by Bingham's charm and passion during these early speeches, as the film progresses, we quickly learn that there is nothing genuine about Bingham's job. Rather than seeking to truly help with the termination process, these speeches are, like almost everything in the film, automated performances that Bingham regurgitates over and over again no matter what situation he is in.

Even Bingham himself has huge doubts about the meaning and value of his services. In the opening scene, for example, the viewer is shown Bingham in action, as he fires Steve, an employee Bingham has just met. After Steve is fired Bingham then speaks directly to the camera, asking a question that is meant to resonate throughout the film: “Who the fuck am I exactly?” Attempting to answer his own question, Bingham provides this frank and uncompromising observation: “Poor Steve has worked here for over 7 years. He has never had a meeting with me before or passed me in the hall or told me a story in the break room; and that’s because I don’t work here; I work for another company that lends me out to pussies like Steve’s boss, who don’t have the balls to sack their own employees and for good reason because people do crazy shit when they get fired.”

Just as Bingham’s sexual life is deeply precarious, as he finds love on the road, the presence of a firm that specializes in firing people from a distance resonates well with the film’s overall theme of the problems of domestic intimacy. This is most poignantly evidenced in one of the film’s opening montage scenes, where, in a documentary like format, various unemployed workers are given the opportunity to share their experiences with being fired. What is striking in these confessionals is how strongly the interviewees come to see the workplace as an intimate social sphere, as if the work office were a home away from home. Losing your job, one man comments, is just as stressful as losing a loved one.

Oddly despite the deeply depersonalized relationship Bingham has with these employees, he somehow still feels that his job is essential, that it is his one-on-one involvement with the clients that makes the act of being fired bearable. Arguing that the new software programs do not allow for those personable and intimate touches

that are needed when firing an individual, Bingham is even asked to prove his claims by escorting the software designer around the country, showing her the “proper” way to terminate employees. In the end, Bingham is unsuccessful. For not only are Bingham’s services just as depersonalizing as the software program, but he’s lack of interest is downright fatal. When Bingham’s boss informs him that one of his clients recently committed suicide, Bingham adamantly declares that in no way is he to blame. But when asked if the woman showed any of the typical signs of suicide, Bingham’s mind runs blank: more of an automated firing service, Bingham is simply unable to remember all the emotional nuances of the people he fires.

Love and the Home’s Redemption:

Though Bingham is at the beginning of the film a devout believer in his “backpack philosophy,” toward the end we see him show a change of heart: Alex no longer seems like the perfect transient companion, the perfect temporary love-interest. Slowly but surely Bingham desires to add more “stuff” to his backpack, suffering perhaps what Theano Terkenli calls the inevitable return to home. Observing that when societies are beset by constant change and migration people often try to protect themselves against transience by evoking nostalgic ideas of the home:

In the contemporary Western world, fraught with alienation and individualism, the concept of quality time was invented to compensate for the dissolution of home by engaging in intense, concentrated patterns of interaction. In other words, concerted efforts are being made to share diminishing free time with people or routines that are part of home. Thus people seek to endow value and reinforce their attachment to a part of their lives that is in peril of being lost or altered by the constant expansion of their lifeworlds through communication and transportation. A related phenomenon of contemporary North American culture is that at some point in midlife people turn toward sharing the intimacy of home or lifestyle with people they consider part of home instead of striving to surpass outsiders. The current, widespread nostalgia for the home and the family, however they might be construed, becomes all the more poignant, because people find

themselves not independently but through other people and institutions (1995: 333).

It would appear that Bingham indeed suffers from a sudden desire to dwell within a monogamous home. After spending several weeks in sexual limbo - meeting up with Alex for an impromptu series of one night stands - Bingham suddenly decides to upgrade to a slightly larger backpack, to perhaps even settle down. What other interpretation could be given for Bingham's unexpected decision to invite Alex to visit his hometown and attend his niece's wedding? For is not this the ultimate sign of domesticity, that one is now a member of the family? But perhaps just as surprising is that Alex actually accepts the invitation. Having renounced the path of domesticity like Bingham, one wonders if Alex also had a change of heart and decided to take a chance on becoming the member of someone's family.

And so Alex and Bingham head off for Milwaukee to attend one of the most familial of social rituals – a wedding that not only signifies Bingham's rejection of his own backpack philosophy, but it is the opportunity for Bingham to redeem himself and regain his position within the family. When the groom decides to call the wedding off moments before the celebration, (the groom, it seems, has come to see the benefits of packing light) – the family turns to Bingham to remedy the crisis. After all, the sister protests, he is a motivational speaker. Bingham, of course, is surprised: “I coach people to stay uncommitted.” But the sister remains unfazed, arguing that this is his chance to prove that he is still a real member of the family. “You have never really been a part of this family,” the sister states, “and you have never been a part of your niece's life: but I tell you this, this is your chance!”

Bingham, in the end, saves the day, proving not only that he can help people deal with issues of commitment, but that he no longer needs to push family matters

aside. As if he were diagnosing his own malaise and the hope for the future, Bingham declares to the groom that “life is better with company. Everyone needs a co-pilot.” But despite this warm and fuzzy declaration, Bingham never finds his own true love, never settles down and fully accepts the world of domestic baggage. For even though everything seems to going splendid with Alex - he takes her to his home town, shows her around his old high school and even lets her see some of his old yearbook pictures - Bingham’s relationship with Alex suffers from one major flaw: she already has a family to call her own. Possessing a nice home with nice kids and a husband, Alex was never whom she claimed to be, never a true member of Bingham’s elusive club of mobility and transience.

Despite all Bingham’s efforts to attain a stable domestic life, his relationship with Alex only confirms the appeal of his backpack philosophy. And so, when the company decides to abandon the new software program and send out its mercenaries, Bingham gleefully returns to his life on the road. Indeed, as the film closes and we are once taken up in the air, into the floating clouds, Bingham declares rather self-righteously, “Tonight most people will be welcomed home by jumping dogs and squealing kids; their spouses will ask them about their day and tonight they will sleep, the stars will reel forth from their daytime hiding places and one of those lights, slightly brighter than the rest, will be my wing tip passing over.”

But while we might be asked to identify with Bingham and his pursuit of the (un)homely, other parts of the narrative suggest that, in spite of the transient and disruptive qualities of modern work, the creation of nostalgic homes is not only desired but possible. Indeed, if Bingham represents the anti-social force of modern capitalism, with its quick fixes and empty human resources, at the film’s conclusion

the viewer is invited to consider how the traditional family home can serve as the remedy to capitalism malfunction. This faith in the institution of the home is seen moments before Bingham takes flight, when the viewer is re-introduced to those unemployed souls first introduced at the film's opening. Again, in a documentary style, the viewer is presented with a series of personal confessions that seriously puts into question Bingham's whole philosophy: no matter how hard things were, no matter how utterly dejected these people felt after being fired, their families were the saving grace: as one man boasts proudly "I simply would have not made it without my friends and family."

As with *Up in the Air*, *Punch Drunk Love*'s eccentric tale of dislocation is resolved through the pursuit of heterosexual love. As such, the film moves into more traditional territory, using the consummation of heterosexuality as a way to close off all the film's jarring exploration of Egan's (un)homely life. In other words, Egan's life is redeemable or tolerable only when he finds a cute and loveable woman on which to concentrate his energies. But while Egan's destiny resides in finding a mate, his movement towards home is not the same as Bingham's. Egan instead finds a compromise between the poles of mobility and stasis. In short, the film's narrative of love does not arrive at the typical site of domestication, which would see Egan tied to a particular place, or crowned as the head of the household. Instead, when Egan becomes empowered by his new love life, his trip into the world of the non-place provides him with the opportunity to fashion a mobile home, a life of potential travel that will depend on using his massive amount of airmiles.

Like Bingham's ideal mate, Alex, Egan's love interest is also a mobile worker, whose work takes her all over the country. When Egan inquires about her personal

life, for example, Lena's response centers on her job and the fact that she is rarely at home. Could Lena's itinerant life be the hindrance that will prevent Egan from finding a romantic partner? Will Lena need to be grounded in order to find a more static way of life in order for this relationship to work? It appears that this will not be the case. For when things really start to get serious, Egan decides to take a chance: instead of merely accumulating airmiles he decides to actually use them for travel. It is a far from unique choice, but one that will fill Egan's new need for his own mobile family: "Just give me 6 to 8 weeks," Egan pleads to Lena at the film's conclusion, "and I can redeem my mileage and then I can go with you wherever you have to travel."

Conclusion

Punch Drunk Love and *Up in the Air* are strange romance stories, no doubt, but in their exploration of the strange new world of mobile work and loyalty reward programs, both films provide different readings of the home's relationship to consumption. If, as Hirsch and Silverstone argue, consumption depends on the moral economy of the home and the spaces of everyday life, what happens when the home is abandoned for mobile work and consumption becomes a kind of productive labor?

While both films undoubtedly represent the home as an empty space that is no longer considered in opposition to work, the manner in which each protagonist approaches this transient world differs. For Bingham the pursuit of joining the million mile club seems more of an escape or retreat into a vacuous zone of aseptic relationships: armed with his loyalty reward cards, Bingham always knows what to expect from the other. Egan, on the other hand, treats these spaces with an aura of absolute enchantment; in the supermarket eyeing the myriads of glossy, hyper-saturated mass consumer products, Egan nears a state of ecstasy. The same is true of

the film's treatment of airports and hotels. Everything about Egan's trip to Hawaii - from his movement through the airport to his meeting with Lena in the hotel lobby - resounds with an old fashioned romance, as though the two lovers were in a quaint Hollywood musical. Indeed, as the two kiss in the hotel the entire aura is one of nostalgic pleasure. In short this is not the world of monotone hotels, indistinguishable international airports or homogenous travel experiences. Finally, if for Bingham the choice to be made involves either home or mobility, for Egan both worlds can coincide: by redeeming his airmiles for a new life of travel, Egan has the chance of following his love interest, of maintaining a home on the road. Perhaps this is the only solution: in a world where work involves excessive mobility perhaps the best homes will be those that are on the move.

Chapter 5

The Terrible Lightness of Being Mobile: *Cellphone* and the Dislocation of the Home

Mobile Work and Play – The Uncanny Feeling of Being Everywhere

While mobile technologies, like the internet, have been praised for their use as sources of individual pleasure, mobile communications have also garnished attention for the way they give rise to the untethered worker.²³ Several years ago, for example, Sprint featured a range of commercials that envisioned the successful businessman in terms of access to fast and reliable mobile networks. In one commercial, Dan Hesse, the CEO of the company, is found working effortlessly in a taxi cab as he travels around New York City. Drawing the absurd parallel between the life of a CEO and the average worker, the bottom line expressed here is that success depends on having access to Sprint's ultra-fast and efficient mobile devices and networks. That is, whereas for the 'mobile deficient' worker taking a taxi cab represents an inefficient use of time and space, as one remains outside the spaces of work, for the Sprint customer every space, even a trip around the city, forms a potential site of work. As the commercial explains, because the new mobile worker is backed by a 3G cell phone network and fast mobile Internet, success is ensured, as there is now no reason not to be working. In short, in a world where access to information is instantaneous, all places can stand in for the corporate office.

²³ See, for example, Cullen, Norbert and Schmidt's *Work and Family in the eWork Era* and Andriessen and Vartainen's *Mobile virtual work: a new paradigm?*

In another commercial Sprint continues its masculinist portrayal of mobile work, referring to the problem of keeping a constant network connection as ‘connectile dysfunction.’ Much like the taxi cab commercial, in which work is no longer hindered by physical spaces, the setting for this advertisement is an airport, where saddened men sit around depressed by their lack of communicative prowess. Without fast access to mobile networks these men are cast off as society’s under-achievers, men who fail the test of mobile virility. Indeed, it is only after a couple of sexy women hand the men a Sprint mobile card that their moods suddenly improve, as they are now cured of their ‘connectile dysfunction’ and free to reconnect with their work environments.

Interestingly, while these earlier commercials suggest that mobile technologies belong to the serious world of men’s work, today’s mobile user is far more variant, as mobile communications are no longer restricted to the stereotypical “blackberry” businessman, but include a wide range of social groups and practices.²⁴ This is easily seen in HTC’s “You” campaign, where the company’s mobile phone is designed to meet the mobile needs of many different people, from late night office workers and family members to frisky adults and youthful backpackers. Long gone are the days when possessing a mobile phone, like the Blackberry, connoted ones’ business status; instead, today’s mobile phones are indicators of divergent lifestyles, behaviors and choices that supposedly provide the user with a unique individuality. Yet, while both commercials use different social groups to promote a world of perpetual mobility, both commercials still revolve around a similar set of discourses or expectations:

²⁴A good overview of some of the new cultures and social practices associated with mobile technologies can be found in Katz’s *Handbook of Mobile Communication Studies* and *Magic in the Air: Mobile Communication and the Transformation of Social Life*.

flexible, “light,” and instantaneous, mobile devices are supposed to provide users with the tools for managing and controlling their space and time. As Katz and Aakhua write regarding the new forms of flexibility that arise through mobile technologies:

The spread of mobile communication, most obtrusively as cell phones but increasingly in other wireless devices, is affecting people’s lives and relationships. Cell phones speed the pace and efficiency of life, but also allow more flexibility at business and professional levels as well as in family and personal life. They are a boon for those who feel they are not accomplishing enough. People can harness spare time, or time previously spent in tasks that seem not to require full attention (for instance, waiting on a shopping queue, or, far more disturbingly, driving. They can use this time to plan and coordinate with others, get information or messages (2002:2).

For Katz and Aakhus, the expansion of the spatial and temporal horizons of the mobile user not only involves greater access to work and home, or the ability to perform tasks from everywhere and at any time, but can lead to feelings of power and self-determination. In short, by having access to one’s social and work life at all times, mobile technologies assist in the enhancement of individual liberation.

Mobile telephones are praised, on the one hand, as devices that will liberate individuals from the constraints of their settings. Individuals who master these devices are shown as people who control their destiny. Stories circulate that focus on how people manage the contemporary demand to be in multiple places at one time or to simultaneously serve multiple roles and present multiple faces. These stories heap praise and honor on those who pull off such an elegant performance through the use of technology (2002:7,8).

In the next two chapters I wish to consider this image of the mobile phone as a flexible and light communications device that provides users control over their social life through examination of two films, Feng Xiaogang’s comedic melodrama *Cellphone* and Laurent Cantent’s *Time Out*. In opposition to the slick campaigns mentioned above, both films raise serious questions about whether or not mobile communications really provide users with the ease, transparency and flexibility promised by the mobile industry. Furthermore, while the issue of mobility has been

framed in terms of the way mobile device free people from specific places, my analysis will look at how mobile communications are still tied to particular places, like the family home. As we will see, while both films show how our societies have become consumed by mobility, as people continue to manage and perform their social lives on the go, the matter of motility cannot be separated from the issue and experience of the home. For if the phone (in the era of the landline) was once about the firm relationship between the home and various outsides, in an age of “perpetual contact” new mobile networks allow family members to crisscross many different spaces. As such, the physical space of the home no longer acts as the stable ground for intra-familial interactions; rather various undetectable spaces form a kind of nebulous network in which family members can never be sure of the whereabouts or social context of others.

In my analysis, this new feature of mobile technologies (Katz refers to it as a form of absent presence) leads to an (un)homely domestic sphere, where the inability to monitor and track the spaces of a caller creates precarious social interactions. Indeed, as melodramatic stories about family deception, both films show how mobile technologies can disrupt domestic spaces, as the device is used to conceal and disclose various family secrets. Subsequently, instead of the mobile device offering a flexible way to manage one’s social life, in these films control and liberation are seriously questioned, as mobile technologies become quite “heavy” as they continue to thwart the privacy people have over their mobile lives.

Chapter 5 is devoted to Xiaogang Feng’s *Cell Phone*, a comedic melodrama that traces the marital woes a television star faces when his mobile network becomes infiltrated by his wife, exposing his web of deception and lies. More specifically, I will

look at how Feng gauges the cultural and social changes precipitated by the mobile revolution by contrasting cell phone technologies with traditional telephony. That is, for Feng, not only does the rise of cell phone cultures represent a shift in how information is exchanged via private mobile networks, but the mobile device itself actually becomes a “heavy” device that is simply unmanageable for the film’s male characters. Indeed in *Cell Phone* the burden of managing his love life via his mobile devices will prove too much for Yan, forcing him in the end to retreat into a nostalgic yearning for simpler times, when the wired telephone was used for only serious purposes. As in *Time Out*, to be discussed later, here the question of mobility will be tied to a crisis in masculinity. While the device is pictured as the ideal tool for creating a flexible home life (in the film Yan uses the phone to not only check in on his wife, but it is used to simultaneously arrange his extramarital affairs), the device eventually betrays Yan, sending him down a spiraling path of marital woe that ends in a paranoid fear of all mobile technologies

The second film I examine - Laurent Cantet’s chilling melodrama *Time Out* - also looks at how mobile phones contribute to familial problems, especially the way the device can detach the user from the spaces of the home and help foster an alternate life based on deception and lies. However, whereas mobile phone practices prove “too heavy” for Feng’s male protagonist, in *Time Out* the cell phone becomes “too light” for Vincent, an unemployed man whose decision to concoct a false life in another country leads him further and further away from the safety net of the home. Recently fired from his lack-luster job, Vincent decides to take a “time out” from the “manly” responsibilities of work and creates an imaginary job at the United Nations, where he helps Third World counties create new business opportunities. However,

with time Vincent's false life spirals out of control. Indeed, as we will see, Vincent's precarious mobile connection to his home will lead him to create an uncanny disruption of the home, a process that forces him to come face to face with his role as a contemporary father and worker.

Film and Phones

Analyzing the use of cellphones in film may seem like a strange and impossible endeavor. After all, the use of cellphones and other digital devices in film is ubiquitous. Like other everyday artifacts that make up the film's *mise-en-scène*, cellphones are simply there, a quotidian feature of the environment that hardly form the central thematic concern of most contemporary films. However, as Ned Schantz (2003) argues, just because telecommunications devices, like telephones or cellphones, blend into the backdrop of many films, this does not mean that they cannot be singled out and explored in terms of their thematic and formal contributions to narrative. As Schantz writes in his article "Telephonic Film," throughout modern film the telephone has played a vital role within narratives. However, to understand the formal ways in which telephones relate to narrative it is necessary to treat telephones and other telecommunications devices as more than mere decoration. The telephone is not just another domestic sign of the modern age. Instead, for Schantz, as an omnipresent technological device that enables the viewer to peer into the home and gain access to the private lives of multiple characters, the telephone is the perfect narrative device:

As our favorite way into the homes and offices of fictional characters, the telephone serves novelistic interest as it moves into the twentieth century, affirming that individuals are still worth watching. Our gossipy desire to know becomes a desire for the phone to ring, or to place a call ourselves...We might indeed ask if the phone is not to the cinema what the letter is to the novel: the vehicle for the incorporation of multiple positions from which to narrate – the somewhat wobbly vehicle that, in its inherent vulnerability to inception, delay,

misunderstandings, or disguise, dependably delivers the conditions of instability that makes narrative possible (Shantz, 2003).

For Schantz, not only is the telephone intimately bound to the conditions of narrative, but modern cinema offers a range of “telephone systems,” discourses that articulate the different and competing ways telephony has been understood and practiced in society. For while we might think of the telephone as a uniform, even universal, technology, the social and cultural roles afforded to such technologies often tell a very different story. One way in which we can explore the filmic telephone, for example, is along the lines of gender norms. As Schnatz argues, in many modern films the telephone emerges as a specifically male-coded technology. Referring to this form of telephone as the Classic Hollywood Telephone, Schantz contends that, in the hands of many male protagonists, the telephone is treated as an agent of social order, as the device comes to embody the masculine traits of command, control and communicative transparency. As Schantz writes, the Classical Hollywood Telephone “is an idealized phone that serves genre by transmitting a singular meaning. In this fantasy the phone always works smoothly, allowing its human masters to forget their bodies, their surroundings—indeed the apparatus itself—to engage in communication with perfect control” (2003).

But while many classic Hollywood films offer images of perfect and ideal forms of communication, in other films the masculine dream of disembodied communication is shown to have gone terribly awry. In *Gossip, Letters, Phones: The Scandal of Female Networks in Film and Literature*, for example, Schantz explores how female networks can upset the smooth workings of the Classic Hollywood Telephone, as female gossip, complex and forking communicative exchanges, noise and delays undermine and thwart the singular messages of the serious masculine Hollywood

Phone. However, in order to see these female networks in action it is necessary, according to Schantz, to delve outside the mainstream cultures. As Schantz writes:

Picture women using whatever resources they have at their disposal to support and promote each other - not in any Utopia or sheltered enclave, but in the modern world as it has developed since the eighteenth century. Picture therefore female networks at once fragmented and technologically extended, operating around and against powerful men with all of their advantages, redirecting the powers of knowledge, money, and affect that maintain gender among so many other devastating social asymmetries. In your forming this vision, I doubt you will find that the dominant narrative culture of this era-call it the British Novel and Hollywood Film-is of any great help. This culture tends either to confirm the hostility among women we already regret...or to take women singly or "between men." But female networking has been occurring all along. Far from innocent or pure, it nonetheless escapes envy, cruelty, and petty selfishness, if only for a moment, and makes its way toward the surface of culture, where we can finally begin to see how wide it spreads (2008:3).

Thus, while much of mainstream narrative evokes the workings of the male phone, there is still evidence of another kind of telephonic apparatus, a distinctly female network, that can seriously challenge and distort the singularity of ideal communication. This is, in short, the world of distortion and delay, a world where long distance communication and other kinds of networking clog the lines of pure transmission. And while Schantz insists that these networks are not utopian in the sense of providing secluded spaces built specifically for women, they still provide some hope for a more inclusive and less domineering telephonic system – one that does not disavow the inherent differences built into communication.

In my analysis both of these gendered telephonic systems will be used to explore the formal dimensions of cellphone systems, especially how mobile devices rest on the competing discourses and practices of masculine control and female disruption and delay. Indeed, as we will see, in both films the domestic home will not be conceived of as the proper space of women, where female characters are contained and isolated to the domestic interior. Rather, in conjunction with wireless networks,

the home will function like a kind of Bermuda Triangle that threatens the smooth workings of the mobile phone.

Escape from the Home: The Flexibility and Burden of a Mobile Life

As a film about the desire to perfectly command and control communication technologies, *Cell Phone* wastes no time in setting the parameters for what is required to actually pull off this feat. As the film opens, the viewer is thrown, not into the contemporary world of hyper fast mobile networks, but, through a flashback, into rural China during the 1960's. In contrast to the frenzy and speed that we might expect from a film set in contemporary Beijing, everything in this opening scene is extremely slow and patient. The year is 1969 and Yan (now a young man) is shown joyfully riding his bicycle with his cousin. The couple, it seems, have set off towards the village to make their first phone call. But, while everything in this opening scene suggests a peaceful calm, according to the voice over narrator, this trip will be quite significant for Yan and his detrimental experience with communication technologies. As the voice-over-narrator explains, there are four significant events in the early life of the protagonist that will determine not only the young man's success (Yan ends up becoming a famous television host) but also lead to the hero's eventual demise.

While each of these events formulates one of the film's core themes (for example, "his cousin gets married" represents the theme of marital life) what interest me is how these events are foretold. Whereas the characters in the film are bound to their own unique and limited perspectives and, as such, only ever maintain partial knowledge of their lives, the voice over narrator maintains a special epistemological position. Unbound by chronological time, able to see into both the past and the future, capable of providing an objective account not only of what will happen in the

film, but of what events are ultimately most important, the voice over narrator is the perfect example of an agent capable of commanding and controlling the circuits of communication. Indeed, as a disembodied voice that manipulates and transmits the “most important” narrative events, the voice-over-narrator captures quite poignantly what Schantz calls the impossible fantasy of telepathic communication.²⁵

There are many ways in which films bring into focus the reality of the Classical Hollywood Phone. The most obvious perhaps involves the characters’ actual use of telephones. In many early “talkies,” for example, the ideal telephonic situation can be seen in those bravado performances in which the male hero commands the phone as though it were a natural extension of the body. Here it seems the hero gets exactly what he wants because of a certain telephonic dexterity, as if how he talked on the phone was an indicator of his proficiency and masculinity. But there are other, more formal ways in which films emulate the smooth functioning of the telephone. A case in point is the use of voice-over-narration. As an unseen voice that is potentially everywhere, sees everything and knows all the most intimate details of the character’s thoughts and actions, voice-over-narration provides a poignant example of the absolute control and transparency associated with the masculine Hollywood Telephone. For Schantz this kind of impossible power even demands an alternate name, the “telepathic telephone,” a perfected form of telephony, where communication no longer requires a medium but occurs instantly and perfectly by channeling messages between minds. As Schantz writes, “Telepathy is the telephone in a perfect state of dematerialization – no apparatus, no sound waves, no ear. Thoughts simply move from one mind to another without static, delay, or the need for

²⁵ See Chapter 4, “Voices Carry: Film and Telepathy,” of *Gossip, Letters, Phones: The Scandal of Female Networks in Film and Literature*.

translation. Death and distance pose no obstacles. The only thing can go wrong is the mind itself' (2008: 80).

In *Cell Phone* this opening voice-over-narration represents the impossible telepathic situation all the male characters in the film desire. In short, in order to control and maintain the rigid distinction between their home lives and their lives of infidelity, the male characters depend on the impossible fantasy of telepathic communications. Yet, as we will see, the knowledge and transparency possessed by the voice-over-narrator will forever remain out of reach. However, while the voice-over-narrator represents an impossible ideal, interestingly the film will distinguish between technologies which provide the highest range of control. That is, while traditional telephone technologies will come close to embodying the ideal masculine phone, this same stability will not be imparted to cellphones. Rather in the film cellphones will represent a new mode of telematics connectivity that undermines, rather than reinforces, the male order of things.

A Nostalgic Look Back: Imposing Order on Traditional Telephony

The opening scenes of *Cellphone* are narrated in a flashback. The year is 1969 and Yan's village has just installed its first telephone wires. However, unlike the western world's privatized approach to telephony, in which the phone is confined to the family home, in Yan's small Chinese village the phone emerges as a public resource that functions more like a postal system than a private network of intimate messages. The phone, for example, is positioned in a community building, is open to the public and is administered by an official telephone agent.

Despite these differences in the status of the phone and its relationship to the spaces of the home, one thing that seems unchanging about telephony is the phone's

accentuation of domestic contact, as the phone is used to reach out to loved ones, to extend the family home to others who remain distant. After all, Yan and his cousin's excitement over making their first call is not simply due to the abstract possibility of making contact with the outside world. Their joy is domestic and personable, as they hope to use the phone to contact a special family member who is working in a remote coal mine. The cousin, it seems, desperately misses her husband and is curious to know when he will be returning home.

But, if the opening scene begins with a joyful innocence, as Yan anticipates making his first call, by the end of this scene his jubilation will be seriously diminished, as a range of formal procedures and rigid social parameters will restrict how the phone is used. As mentioned earlier, for Yan the power of the telephone resides in its ability to forge and maintain domestic relationships from a distance. However, for the much more serious and masculine telephone operator, the telephone will not succumb to the world of "idle domestic chatter." On the contrary, the phone belongs to the order of the serious Hollywood Phone, and as such will require specific rules to ensure stability, as if the phone required the guidance of rigid laws in order to prevent the user from succumbing to the uncertainties of a female domestic sphere.

The first of these formal rules is evidenced when Yan is forced to delay his first phone call. When Yan arrives at the phone office, for example, he is told that the use of the phone is necessarily restricted by a rigid timetable, wherein only certain times of the day can be used to make calls. The second and most important restriction involves the specific content relayed through the telephone wires. In short, the telephone is not a frivolous technology to be used on a whim; nor should the telephone be used for any social purpose. Rather, and much to Yan's embarrassment,

only serious calls are accepted, a requirement that is designed to put a hold on all the chatty gossip associated with female talk. Unaware of this “masculine” prescription, Yan’s excitement about making his first call quickly turns to ridicule when he is chastised for clogging up the phone lines with frivolous “female” requests. “This is not an appropriate phone call,” the operator bemoans. “Phones are for serious calls, not for the amusement of house wives who may want to know when their husband will be returning home.”

As we will see, this opening flashback is crucial to deciphering the importance of Yan’s troubling encounter with the mobile phone. For if the cell phone will be about urban society and the decline of the family, the telephone will represent the traditional values of the rural countryside; if the cell phone will represent networks and the exclusive, decontextualized spaces of domesticity and privatization, the telephone will be understood as a public communications technology; and if the cellphone participates in a complicated process of concealing and disclosing information, the telephone will evoke the principles of pure transparency. Furthermore, throughout the course of the narrative, Yan’s response to this dichotomy will change. While at the beginning of the film Yan will reject the rigidity of village life, as he uses his mobile device incessantly to deceive his wife, near the end of the film the ideals of masculine control will come to represent a nostalgic framework, a map of simpler times, where telephone technologies are bound to the “laws of the father.”

The Unbearable Lightness of Being: Cellphones and the Disruption of the Home

In a film about the disintegration of martial life, Feng wastes no time in signaling out the technological culprit responsible for infusing the home with secrets, lies and deception. After the lightning-fast opening credits subside, the camera is

catapulted into Yan's apartment window, where we see his wife, Yu, engage in "typical" domestic duties, cleaning up and maintaining the family home. However, while the question of the proper role of the domestic wife will be raised and challenged throughout the film, in this passage the camera bypasses the wife's domestic activities in order to zone in on a specific object within the home. Abruptly stopping at a table, the camera focuses blatantly on Yan's cellphone, as if it were able to anticipate the phone's incoming call. Here, with this shift in attention from domestic duties to mobile communications, the film immediately situates the core problematic of the story: this will not only be a typical melodrama, with its share of the traditional themes of material distrust, erotic desire and domestic conflict, but one whose challenges to marital harmony will depend on how everyday technologies, like cellphones, are used, managed and monitored by the characters. That is, in sharp contrast to the way the telephone fostered the social order in the flashback, by delineating the proper and gendered use of the phone, in the rest of the story the banality and quotidian life of cellphones will transform the domestic scene from one of marital stability to a network of conflicting and manipulative knowledge.

Just as Katz and Aakhus describe mobile devices as flexible technologies that allow the user to take control over how they use their time, for Yan the cellphone represents a highly personalized communication device that enables him to manage his social life. Like most mobile users, the device remains by his side throughout most of the film and he obsessively uses it all times of the day, during leisure time and work, while traveling in his car and on the train. He even uses it while using the bathroom. However, while for many users the mobile phone has replaced the home phone, becoming more of individual device than a family technology, in the film Yan's

cellphone habits cannot be divorced from his relationship to domestic space. Much of Yan's woe, in fact, emerges from his desire to use the phone to facilitate two contradictory activities: on the one hand, the mobile phone strengthens Yan's ties to the spaces of the home. On the other hand, the decontextualized nature of mobile communication provides him with some freedom from the spaces of the domestic interior. Speaking about the former activity, especially the way the phone enables people to maintain familial bonds, even when they are distant, isolated or on the move, Katz and Aakhus write:

Less dramatically, the mobile phone is praised as a means to facilitate the planning and coordination of everyday matters. It is also a means to "be in touch" to offer socio-emotional support. One of the common uses mobile telephone users report with praise involves one family member simply checking in on another to find out "how it is going" or to report that "I'll be home in a few minutes...." The praise thus draws attention to the mobile telephone as a means for friends, family, and other social networks to retain accessibility when they would otherwise be isolated from each other. Sometimes individuals, particularly men, even cite the belief they earn "points" in the relationship for having done so (2002:8).

While Yan's uses the cellphone to "keep in touch" with his family, his phone is equally used to free him from the confines and laws of the family, to step outside the bonds of marriage and pursue his individual sexual desires. Indeed, by having his own private line that is "for his eyes only," Yan is able to maintain a series of social connections that have nothing to do with maintaining the domestic order. Subsequently, alongside the numerous scenes of Yan conversing with his wife are numerous "phone sex" scenes, where the device takes on a "taboo" characteristic, being used to arrange and facilitate Yan's many acts of infidelity.

The Impossibility of Controlling My Prosthetic Device

In the ideal world of mobile communications Yan's coordination of the space of the family and the spaces of infidelity would be rendered smooth, manageable and

predicable. Yet, this ideal of possessing constant control over the phone and what it conceals and discloses is never a simple and straightforward process. In fact, for Yan the management of both spaces becomes downright impossible. What I wish to argue here is that this impossible task is not merely a question of Yan's proficiency, his masculine prowess in commanding the phone, but is a problem inherent in communications technologies. That is, as an external technological device, which is intimately tied to the users' body and identity, the mobile phone, especially its "heaviness," can be explained in terms of what Celia Lury calls the emergence of "prosthetic cultures" – a process of mediation in which the subject's sovereignty is undermined by its intimate dependence on a range of consumable devices that help the subject manage the self and its social environment.

In her book *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity*, Lury discusses how contemporary notions of identity have been altered by the emergence of mass produced prosthetic devices. While we often think of a prosthetic device in medical terms, for Lury the same kind of intimate bonding afforded by medical prosthetics can be equally applied to consumer products and technologies. What matters most is how the technology is tied to the subject's identity and memory, how a product forms an indispensable part of the self. An excellent example that Lury cites is the case of photography, where the camera and the photographic image become an integral part of the subject's memory. For example, many of our homes are littered with a range of photographs, some appearing framed on walls while others are stuffed away in storage. While we might think of these photographs as external objects that exist outside the subject, family photographs actually form an external archive of the past, a kind of

exterior memory that is intimately tied to the subject. After all, when we erase or lose a photograph do we not also jeopardize the memory associated with the image

But because the subject can become dependent on external objects, the subject's self-integrity can be easily compromised. As such, for Lury at the heart of prosthetic self is the breakdown of the Cartesian subject, a structure in which the mind allows the subject to control its self-expressions and environment. In its place Lury contends that prosthetic cultures give rise to the 'subject as other', a situation in which the subject cannot be divorced from its reliance on external prosthetics. Citing the works of Roland Barthes, Lury writes that prosthetic cultures lead to "what Barthes calls 'the advent of myself as other' (1981: 12). The prosthesis - and it may be perceptual or mechanical - is what makes this self-extension possible. In adopting/adapting a prosthesis, the person creates (or is created by) a self-identity that is no longer defined by the edict 'I think, therefore I am'; rather, he or she is constituted in the relation 'I can, therefore I am'. In the mediated extension of capability that ensues, the relations between consciousness, memory and the body that had defined the possessive individual as a legal personality are experimentally dis- and re-assembled" (1998:3).

In Lury's definition of the 'self as other,' personhood is no longer constituted via rigid, immutable boundaries - whether in the sense that identity is the result of possessing a demarcated body or a willing consciousness - but identity arrives via contingent relationships. The subject is no longer given, but, in the post-humanistic world constantly remade and reassembled through relationships with the materials of consumer cultures. Thus it is our relationships to what is offered up by the marketplace, to technological devices, advertisements, and the body parts of consumer

cultures that provide the nuts and bolts of our assembled and preassembled subjectivities.

Like photography, cellphone cultures offer an interesting example of the reality of prosthetic cultures. As sociologists and communication theorists like James Katz and Manuel Castells (2006) have argued, people continue to relate to technological devices, like mobile phones, in complex ways, forging new flexible identities that depend on having access to various information networks. While we might like to think that human agency remains detachable from the devices in our lives, with prosthetic relationships technologies are not merely “additives” that can be discarded on a whim. Rather, these technologies constitute the ground for a range of new kinds of intimate social relations, connections and resources that are created and sustained over vast distances.

In *Cell Phone* one of the key prosthetic relationships fostered through the mobile phone involve the erotic possibilities of connecting to someone at a distance. Just as many new technologies spawn a range of erotized services and imaginaries, like mobile dating and phone sex, the mobile phone is for Yan another interface that can be used to project and circulate his sexualized fantasies. But the phone is not merely a device used to *arrange* his sexual encounters; rather as a new and expendable body part, the phone is itself the very site of an erotic encounter. This is seen in the various erotic text messages Yan receives in his film, as when his mistress Wu invites him to disrobe while he is standing in front of his wife.

Like all sexual encounters, however, Yan’s erotic encounter with mobility comes with its own set of unique risks: unlike the Sprint commercial, in which a fast mobile network provides instant relief from the problems of “connectile dysfunction,”

Yan's erotic encounter with the mobile phone contains none of the informatic virility that is supposed to be fostered through fast and light mobility. Indeed, what is missing from the commercial, but painfully evident in the film, are all the work and stress that come from having to monitor the phone's whereabouts.

A prosthetic is by nature contradictory. Both an external object that can be added or subtracted from the subject and a device that may be seamlessly infused with the subject, even becoming an instrumental part of the subject's survival, a prosthetic device problematizes interior/exterior boundaries. For Yan this problem of delineating clear cut boundaries between inside and outside is translated into the act of surveillance. In order to ensure that his family life does not cross over into his life of infidelity he must monitor constantly where his mobile phone is located at all times. This task of monitoring the location of his device is evoked in the opening of the film, when the camera zones in on Yan's cellphone. While the phone sits inconspicuously on the table, appearing as an innocent facet of the domestic environment, Yan sits in his car, stressing over the phone's whereabouts. Somehow the phone, which is his personal device, his little archive of dirty secrets, has been left unattended, left in the wide open for his wife to use or see. "The phone," Yan complains to his friend Fei, "I must have left it at home, back there for my wife to see, and what if the other woman calls."

While most people inevitably lose or misplace their technological devices, Yan's situation brings into focus the problem of investing so much personal information into a portable, external device, a prosthetic that can easily be intercepted or revealed to an unattended audience. In the end the stress of leaving the phone unattended in his wife's presence is too much for Yan and he decides to abandon his

work commute and return home to reclaim his prized possession. Here, Yan confronts the “heavy” side of the technology, as he become acutely aware of the constant need to keep a guard over his prosthetics. Indeed, this matter of everyday surveillance should not be downplayed. We find, perhaps, in this image of hyper-surveillance, a glimpse into Foucault’s (1977) conclusion that in modern societies surveillance becomes internalized to the point that people control their own behaviors without requiring the presence of an external surveying force.

Of course, in predicable dramatic fashion, Yan’s deepest fears about the misplaced phone are realized. As Yan debates whether or not he should return home to retrieve his phone, Yu intercepts an unexpected call from her husband’s mistress, who without hesitation answers the call with an angry protest: “Why haven’t you returned my calls.” The protest of course is ridiculous since this is the first time Yu has spoken to the woman. As the mistress fails to realize that she has someone else on the line, her call brings into focus the fact that even cellphones can get their wires crossed and mistaken identities can ensue. To alleviate the case of mistaken identity Yu attempts to clarify the situation, declaring “This is his wife. I will pass on a message to him.” The agitated woman then abruptly hangs up. Whether or not this case of a mistaken identity leads Yu to suspect her husband’s infidelity is not clear at this point. Indeed, since receiving a wrong or mistaken number is quite commonplace, there is no way of absolutely knowing if Yu thinks that there is something more behind the disgruntled woman caller. Yet, as we will see, while one strange call may be taken as a mere coincidence, a series of mistaken calls can add up to a hefty amount of suspicion, allowing Yu to read between the lines and question her husband’s fidelity.

I want to pause for a moment and consider how the case of mistaken identity mentioned above relates to specific media forms: is there something special about the cellphone that predisposes it towards mistaken identities, wrong numbers and unexpected calls, or are all media technologies inherently predisposed for failure? As John Durham Peters has argued, the dream of stable lines of communication has always had to confront the reality of miscommunication, interception and noise, as both the technical and semiotic nature of mass communications predispose media to failure. Speaking about how the noisy nature of mass media has even altered our faith in the communicative ideals of face to face communication, Peters writes: “The potentials for disruption in long-distance “communication”- lost letters, wrong numbers, dubious signals from the dead, downed wires, and missed deliveries- have since come to describe the vexations of face-to-face conversation as well. Communication as a person-to-person activity became thinkable only in the shadow of mediated communication” (1999:6).

If, according to Peters, all forms of communication entail the possibility of failure, is there anything special about the mistaken identity encountered in *Cellphone*? If the call had been made to the home line, for example, would the result be the same? Partly. As Ned Schantz (2003) writes, missed calls or wrong numbers are common in many narrative films, with the telephone providing the structural basis for the mistaken identities required for the film’s narrative tension. As a technology of long distance communications similar to the traditional phone line, then, cellphones too can lead to narrative tensions, as unexpected and unknown callers create an uneasiness about who or what lurks on the other side of the call.

However, while the cellphone call at the opening of Feng's film conforms to the potential disruptions of many kinds of long-distance communications systems, from the errors of the postal system to radio interceptions, the highly personalized nature of mobile devices alters the way these mistaken identities emerge. When Yan's mistress makes her heated call, demanding to know why she has not been contacted, for example, her unexpected conversation with Yu is not a case of 'sorry, wrong number'. She has dialled correctly and has been connected to the right number; the real confusion comes from her expectation that the only person to have access to the phone is Yan. That is, unlike the home telephone, which is predominately associated with the family unit, mobile devices are usually treated as personal technologies that are tied to only a particular user. Dialling a mobile number we often feel like we always have a direct link to the other, as if the line provided a stable and predictable connection to the person and not the phone. So while many modes of mass communications may be prone to communicative failure or mistaken identities, here the mobile phone shows how not all 'crossed wires' occur in the same way.

Memory Machines

In the preceding comments, we noted how Yan's troublesome relationship with his mobile phone involved his perpetual need to monitor its spatial whereabouts, especially the phone's place within the family home. This spatial burden is complemented by another problem, one that deals with the matter of time. While mobile devices have been traditionally understood more as an instantaneous communication device, with which contact may occur at all times in the immediate present, wireless devices also maintain a unique relationship to the past, as the "storage" capabilities of the device allows the user to keep an archive of preceding

social interactions. Indeed, as mobile devices become more sophisticated users can choose between a wide range of programs and applications - from contact lists, voice mail and email to text messages, video and photos – that store information about the user’s social interactions. Consequently, unlike the traditional telephone, with which social interaction ends when the phone is “hung up,” with mobile devices the social life of a user can persist beyond the immediate present.

Recently the issue of how mass technologies provide archives of the past has been explored by various theorists. In the work of Alison Landsberg, for example, mass media can be viewed as an instance of what she calls prosthetic memories. For Landsberg the means by which information about the past is created and shared in modern mass society changes with the creation of mass media. In short, with the proliferation of modern media technologies, such as the cinema, photography and museums, the task of disseminating stories about the past is no longer a localized or individual process. Rather, how people relate to the past depends on their access to modern media technologies.

As she writes in the introduction to her book *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*,

‘This book argues that modernity makes possible and necessary a new form of public cultural memory. This new form of memory, which I call prosthetic memory, emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history...In the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics (2004:2).

For Landsberg key to prosthetic memory is the ways in which people can feel connected to a past that they may not have actually lived through. By sharing in

collective media events, either through museum exhibits, television shows or films, people can create deep, empathic relationship to stories that they have not personally encountered. Thus, just as Lury's notion of prosthetic cultures redraws the boundaries between inside and outside, Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memories shows how ideas of near/far and authentic/inauthentic are transformed by mass media.

While I think Landsberg makes some important observations about collective memory in an age of technological prosthetics, the more interesting question I think raised by *Cell Phone* is how mass cultures provide portable memory machines, that do not belong to some larger public sphere, but are highly personalized and portable archives that can be detached from their source and circulated independently. Indeed one of the questions raised in the film is how this archival role functions in relation to the spaces of the home? If the home can be seen as a site for the accumulation of the past, where everyday objects like furniture, books, knickknacks, and clothing provide clues about the family's history, how do the archival properties of new technologies change how we perceive and experience both the home and its domestic past?

As mentioned in a previous chapter, for Jean Baudrillard the traditional home represents a social order, in which rooms, furniture and objects provide a social hierarchy of norms that determine the family's activities, functions and behaviors. Just as the home can be viewed as a mode of ordering, dwelling places also provide clues about the present and past lives of the occupants, details about anything from their current and previous social interactions to the dweller's fantasies, habits and beliefs. A

photograph on a wall, for example, may indicate a previous or anticipated trip. A shopping receipt can indicate the dwellers tastes or style.²⁶

If the home functions as an archive of domestic life, in many films this accumulation can prove quite incriminating, as a range of hidden letters, photographs or objects can be dug up, revealing a range of (un)homely secrets that should have been left buried. In many melodramas about infidelity, for example, the home is often seen as the prime site of spousal investigations, as objects in the home are examined and surveyed in order to provide information or proof of the affair. In the television series *Mad Men*, for example, Betty, a domestic wife who suspects that her husband is hiding something from the family, eventually comes to uncover the entire mystery behind her husband's double life. Interestingly, the disclosure of the mystery does not come from a person (it is not a close friend or jealous lover that spills his secrets); rather, the home itself reveals to her the secrets she has been searching for. One day when doing her husband's laundry, she finds an unfamiliar key in his robe. Suspecting that the key is for a locked cabinet that she has seen in her husband's office, Betty's uses the key and inadvertently uncovers a little box containing all the proof of his double life. What is interesting here is that while, for the husband, the home is a site of protection, a place where he can contain and hide his personal life, for the wife the home can be infiltrated from within to unlock its secrets and mysteries.

If in the preceding example the home serves as the site of accumulated secrets, in *Cell Phone* this role has been displaced to the archival spaces of mobile technologies. This is especially seen in the scene in which Yan returns home after spending an

²⁶ For an account of how the home can function as an unintended archive see Heathcott's "Reading the Accidental Archive Architecture, Ephemera, and Landscape as Evidence of an Urban Public Culture."

evening out with his mistress. As Yan prepares to greet his wife at home, he engages in what appears to be a ritualized performance of erasure, removing all material traces of the affair. Fearful that his wife will smell the other woman's scent, he opens up all the car windows and travels around the city, hoping to air out the car. However, while the physical and bodily traces of the affair are usually the first indicator of the crime, for Yan the successful concealment of his wrongdoing also depends on erasing any technological traces of the other woman.

Unlike the husband in *Mad Men*, whose system of surveillance involves monitoring the static spaces of the home (a task that is poignantly expressed through the figure of the locked safe) Yan's system of surveillance is dispersed across many sites. Since the home in the film is depicted as a site that traverses many boundaries and spaces, as the phone is able to tie together a range of dispersed environments, the task of monitoring the archival traces of Yan's mobile life becomes quite heavy. Ironically, with all these distractions, the constant monitoring and scanning of the phone, Yan's risky life of infidelity actually becomes quite banal, tedious and unsexy. Simply put, with all the fuss demanded of the mobile device, Yan's love life fails to live up to the hot and steamy scenes often seen in many melodramas about the breakup of family homes. Indeed, Yan's affair is presented more like an additional job that he must schedule into his busy life than a pleasurable retreat from responsibility.

The Ideal Female Phone

Earlier I described a family scene in which the camera bypasses Yan's wife, who is engaged in an assortment of 'domestic duties,' and then moves to focus in on Yan's mobile phone. With this exclusive focus on the nonhuman world of mobile electronics one might think that both the scene and the film in general provides little

space for its female characters, treating women as passive fixtures in a film about straying husbands and their wayward passions. However, while *Cell Phone* is undoubtedly a film about men and their electronic toys, the female characters hardly act as passive objects who fail to actively participate in the mobile game of concealing and disclosing information. Quite the contrary, for many of the female characters, access to communication technologies and female networks provide an alternate perspective on the ideal phone. If for the male hero the mobile device is used to maintain a secret life outside the bounds of the home, for the female characters this same device will be used to enhance their detective skills and infiltrate their husband's web of lies.

In this way, the film provides the viewer with two gendered discourses on mobile networks, one in which a more "hopeful kind of phone" is experienced. As Schantz writes:

If the Classical Hollywood Telephone never quite manages to exist, its influence as an ideal can nonetheless be keenly felt when films move toward closure, triggering the narrow expectations of genre. The foreclosing power of this ideal, however, meets resistance when films allow for coincidence to interrupt the smooth flow of singular telephonic meaning. As the phone ceases to behave itself, instead of delivering messages devoutly wished for, it unearths a repressed sense of isolation and chaos. But out of these nightmares we get a glimpse of a more hopeful kind of telephonic film, a film that makes use of the phone's inherent potential to route interest along unpredictable lines (2004:7).

In contrast to the ideal phone, the 'coincidental phone' refers to the way the smooth functioning of communications breakdown, the way unexpected or chance calls, intrusions, noise and delays interrupt control over messages. For the remaining part of this chapter, I will explore several of the ways the female characters expose their husband's deceit. At times, this exposure will come at a cost, as the figure of 'telephonic coincidence' mentioned by Schantz will leave some vulnerable and

isolated. For others, the mobile phone will upset the power struggle, moving the vulnerable female to a position of dominance and authority.

The first female figure to infiltrate and expose a male web of lies is Yu, who, after intercepting a series of phone calls, unveils her husband's infidelity. As Schantz writes, the figure of coincidence is one way in which the ideal phone breaks down, as the singular and predictable process of sending messages encounters the contingent world of erroneous calls:

...some films tell us a different story about the telephone if we know how to listen, reminding us above all that the phone traffics in coincidence. I don't mean by this just the common telepathic sensation of calling someone only to have her say something like "I was just about to call you." Even if we routinely plan calls, subjecting them to all the rationalized coordination of clocks and time zones, we must understand each call as being ripe for the occurrence of multiple, contingent events. We could dial a wrong number, or pick up a neighbor's call, or simply get disconnected. And when everything goes right with the phone itself, there is still the question of controlling our immediate environment, for despite our breathless concentration, enhanced by phone booths and cued in the movies by the close-up, we are not just a mouth and an ear when we talk on the phone. Our whole body remains open to an unpredictable world, to noise, interruption, assault (2004:17).

For Yu, this encounter with the contingency of phone technologies is both liberating and restrictive, both a way to escape a marriage built on lies and an isolating experience that disrupts her faith in the modern world. During one of the scenes when Yan is out with his mistresses, he receives a call from Yu, who calls to inquire about when he will be home for dinner. Hoping to conceal his whereabouts, Yan lies, declaring that he is out for dinner with Fei. Immediately following the call, however, Yu receives an unexpected call from a distant relative that leads Yu to question her husband's truthfulness. Unable to get Yan on his cellphone, the relative wonders if maybe something is wrong. Since Yu had literally just spoken with Yan, his

inaccessibility becomes a sign that something is terribly amiss: why would he turn his phone off if he were merely out with Fei?

Suspicious about her husband's inaccessibility Yu then cleverly overcomes the mobile phone's "radical de-location" by verifying her husband's whereabouts through an alternate route: in short, she relies on the power of a small, but important social network. Getting Fei on his mobile, Yu begins the conversation by innocently inquiring about his whereabouts. But as soon as Fei responds truthfully, Yu immediately protests: "how can you be out walking your dog alone when you are having dinner with Yu? Even though Fei disapproves of the affair, he understands the gravity of his response and backtracks, redrafting his statement so as to keep his story in line with Yan's. But he is too late. Their stories do not match. And so while Yu is unable to verify her husband's whereabouts directly, her understanding of the power of a network helps transform her isolated and limited situation into one of veracity.

A little later in the evening Yu intercepts several unintended calls that will allow her to finally piece together the story of her husband's whereabouts. As Yan prepares to enter the home, he is shown engaging in his ritual of deleting all of his mistress' messages, as if cleaning out his phone were able to simultaneously wipe away all detection of his affair. However, no matter how careful Yan is with his mobile, he cannot be prepared for the contingent encounters that will follow. As Yan enters the home, Yu offers him a last chance to tell the truth, speaking perhaps the most clichéd line in films about infidelity: "Where were you tonight?" Yan continues to lie, stating that he was out with Fei. Of course Yu now knows otherwise. And then, as if fate were on her side, Yu is given all the evidence she needs. First she intercepts a call from Fei, who, falling into the trap of mistaken identities, thinks he is speaking to Yan and

confesses that he failed to cover for him. Then, to seal her knowledge of the affair, Yu intercepts a text message from the mistress, who appears to want a little more action, as she invites him to disrobe. Here, within the matter of seconds, Yu is able to piece together the fragments of Yan's double life. And, just like that, their marriage is over.

While Yu will use the contingency of mobile communications to leave her husband, her separation comes at a cost. Disappearing for most of the latter part of the film, Yu's withdrawal signals an isolating retreat into a pre-technological space of nostalgia. Much like Yan, who finds momentary reprieve from his electronic woes by returning home to his rural village, Yu also decides to leave behind her home and job in the city, retreating to an isolated island that is free of all modern media. Indeed, as if her problems were the direct product of the home's dispersal into a range of networks, Yu's answer to the problems of urban media rests on finding what Agnes Heller (1995) calls monogamous modes of dwelling, a conception of home that emphasizes static and embedded forms of living that stand in sharp contrast to the today's geographic promiscuousness. Even when Yu finally returns to the city, she is still unable to embrace the liberation afforded by new technologies. Her repulsion and distrust of cellphony are particularly notable in the scene in which Yan, desperately trying to rekindle their relationship, offers her a new pink mobile phone that she can use exclusively to contact him. Yan, it seems, fails to see the irony in the offer: just as John Durham Peters envisions media technologies as both problem and cure – both a bridge and chasm that can unite or divide people -- Yan believes that the same technology that helped destroy his family will now somehow provide the stability required to reclaim the family unit.

But this will not be a film about melodramatic closure or the hero's ability to re-establish the ideal family home. Instead, Yan's desire to rebuild his first marriage will only make matters worse, as his "mobile offer" will lead the narrative down the path of *déjà vu*. When Yan's marriage fails, for example, his life goes on as usual: he marries his "dialogue" teacher, keeps his previous mistress and continues his usual cellphone habits, arranging erotic rendezvous throughout the city. When Yu returns, he even adds a third woman to his network of women, completing the film's *ménage-a-trois*. Clearly, however, Yan has learned nothing about the myth of the ideal phone. Believing that more phones are required to keep up the balancing act, Yan remains oblivious to the contingency built into all long distance communications.

Divorce and Marriage: A Case of *Déjà vu*

Like the troubling experience with his first wife, the dismantling of Yan's second family home also arises through the failure of the ideal phone. However, whereas the former experience involved a case of telephonic chance, as Yu intercepts a range of incriminating calls and text messages, the second act of disclosure involves the detective work of a far more active female network. What is important here is not only that the female characters become active - seeking out the information that will expose their husband's wayward lives - but that the singular woman has become many. Unlike Yu, who had no support in her ordeal, Yan's second wife, Shen, is supported by Fei's wife, who must also endure the domestic woe of cheating husbands. Subsequently, whereas Yu had to unravel her husband's web of lies alone, Shen enters into a female network, where sharing info, clues and other data becomes crucial to exposing their husband's lies.

In the next few paragraphs I want to examine several of the clues and procedures both women use to reveal their husbands' dishonesty. In some cases, suspicion will arise out of pure luck, as when Shen accidentally discovers the special pink phone Yan purchased for his ex-wife. At other times, the members of the female network will have to actively pursue incriminating data, using each other to decipher their husbands' true whereabouts and actions. An example of this latter case involves the scene in which both women make a trip to the China Mobile headquarters. As mentioned previously, one of the key features of prosthetic cultures is the way devices like cellphones form external modes of memory. In Yan's case this archival function proves troubling, as he must perpetually monitor his cellphone habits, ensuring that no incriminating evidence is circulated throughout the domestic sphere.

In the China Mobile scene another form of surveillance is revealed that again draws attention to the way that in an age of information personal social interactions belong to different systems of storage. In this case, the circulation of private data is far more Orwellian, as the women attempt to access Yan's phone calls through the mobile companies' centralized system. The operative word here is access. In a world in which technological systems make possible the storage, retrieval and circulation of endless quantities of person data, the principal question becomes not only that of the ontological status of this information (is the data still private information) but the legalistic question of who has access to this data and on what terms.

Interestingly, while, from a legal perspective, retrieving her husband's private data should not be an easy task, since access is restricted to the user rather than the family unit, in this scene Shen has no trouble getting exactly what she wants. Her success, it seems, has everything to do with the power of the female network: just as

the control of the early switchboard telephone system involved the work of endless women, who had intimate power over incoming and outgoing calls, Shen's access to her husband's private data is assisted by the fact that the person in charge is a woman. Whether or not the woman in charge actually provides the data out of sympathy is not known: the clerk merely says that next time (wink-wink?) they need to bring in some kind of id. However, in a film in which access to personal information is played out along gender lines and marital woes are caused by the patriarchal authority of technological system of control, it is not difficult to assume that their access is directly related to what Schantz calls the utopian reality of female networks. For is not this image of an everyday clerk bending the rules a little, to allow a fellow woman to gain a more symmetrical relationship to power, a perfect example of the hope of another telephonic system?

But while Shen uncovers hard evidence of his affair, in the end Yan's infidelity is disclosed once again through the figure of chance. When Shen returns home, for example, she is greeted by Yan's cellphone, which rings just as she enters the door. Yan, it seems, has left his guard down again, leaving his phone in the home for Shen to use and see. Like Yu, who intercepts an incriminating text message, Shen's certainty about her husband's infidelity also comes via a chance encounter with the phone. This time, though, the incriminating text message is accompanied by an unsavory image of Yan in bed with his mistress, Wu. Here Shen is not only empowered by her interception of the message that will seal her suspicions, but she also catches Wu attempting to assert her own female authority by bribing Yan with the image.

I will discuss this act of bribery a little later, as the revealing photograph belongs to another active, technologically savvy character. What interests me here is

how the narrative comes full circle. Like that of Yu, Shen's fate is underscored by the powers of contingency, of chance phone calls. But there is a twist to the second case of *deja vu*. Whereas the affair led Yu into a space of technological isolation, as she steps outside the safety net of marriage, in the second installment it is Yan who spirals downward, losing his grip on reality and becoming disillusioned with the might of mobile technologies.

Yan's downward spiral begins when he returns home to his village to attend his mother's funeral. Like that of Yu, who escapes the hyper technology of the city by moving to an isolated island, Yan's return to village life conjures up the nostalgia, simplicity and paternal authority (at one point the narrator claims that most of all Yan missed his father) represented in the opening flashback. Yan, it seems, is badly in need of a dis-connect from mobile networks. Indeed, purging himself of his 'mobile life' by throwing his cell phone into a ritualistic fire, Yan hopes to transform this phase of mourning into a new life, one in which mobile media technologies play no role. However, Yan's abandonment of high technology does not provide any assurance or stability. When he returns to the city, his social position quickly dissolves: he becomes ill, loses his job and finds himself living with his niece, who ironically has taken a job as the representative of a new mobile company. The niece's job as a 'mobile expert' only makes matters worse, as her presence in the home forms an uncanny reminder of Yan's inability to couple love with high technologies. Indeed, when she offers him a new job as the spokesperson for the company and a new mobile that is equipped with the ever-pervasive GPS feature, Yan cringes in disgust, as if merely being in the company of a phone were the cause of his illness.

According to Noël Carroll (1991) by the end of a typical melodramatic film the male hero has returned the family back to a state of social stability. Commenting on how the family order, like the moral order, has the capacity to restore itself Carroll writes: “The moral order, or at least the moral order being valorized, is presented as part and parcel of the nature of things as a casual force or as a regulatory force with casual efficacy...The nuclear family – the favored form of human relationships in this ethos – is also a part of the cosmic order. If damaged, it restores itself. This process is given as natural in a context where to be natural is right and vice versa. The family plot in melodramatic fiction structures human events in a way that exemplifies and endorses the ideology or ethos it presents as natural” (1991:189).

If for Carroll the family unit has the natural capacity to restore itself after some calamity or crisis, it often falls to the male hero to bring about this restoration. In short, the role of the male protagonist in the melodrama is to bring about the regulatory efficacy of the cosmic order, to make right what has gone terribly awry. In *Cell Phone* no such restoration is possible. On the contrary, the narrative closes with a complete reversal of Carroll’s observation, as Yan is stripped of his sanity, marriage and career. Indeed, as I have shown, a crucial part of this reversal involves the detective work and contingent encounters experienced by the film’s female characters, as if the women were film incapable of being contained by the natural order.

Nowhere is the disruptive work of the female characters more clear than with the character Wu. As Yan’s mistress throughout both of his marriages, Wu is seen mainly in the background. She is the erotic other, the disposable subject who remains outside the “natural order” and is therefore not central to its functioning. During the narrative, though, Wu’s social standing changes. Beginning as the young, sexy and

single mistress, who meddles in the family life of others, Wu eventually marries and becomes, like Yan and Fei, a cheating spouse. However, while Wu becomes like her male counterparts, a notable difference resides in how she successfully manages and controls mobile technologies. Unlike the male characters, who seem unable to control their mobile lives, unable to purify the spaces of the home from an (un)homely encounter with contingency, Wu emerges as the most cunning technophile, who easily uses the latest technologies to her advantage.

As mentioned earlier, Shen retrieves a naughty text message from Wu, which she uses to blackmail Yan. While the picture takes both Shen and Yan by surprise, the viewer has already seen the act of deception take place a few scenes earlier. In this scene we watch Yan and Wu sneak off to a hotel room during Fei's book launch. The couple makes love and then falls asleep. During this time though Wu takes out one of the latest camera phones and proceeds to record the two lovers in bed. In a game in which controlling the latest cellphone technologies is paramount, Wu, it seems, has come out on top. As the voice over narrator tells the viewer at the end, Wu ends up becoming Yan's replacement. Using the photo to blackmail Yan into getting her a job at the television station, Wu shows just how cunning new technologies can be when used for surveillances purposes. In an age when every few weeks someone's public life is ruined by the leaking of unsavory information, *Cell Phone* anticipates just how hard it is to safeguard the family unit from this sort of public discrimination.

Whether or not Wu, in the end, becomes the ideal female character, who uses new technologies to combat traditional inequalities in work and intimacy, is not entirely evident. Certainly, as the film shows, there is no one position for the female characters, who must contend with the controlling tendencies of the Ideal Male

Phone. Rather, as the characters confront the unruly and unpredictable aspects of mobile communications, the risk is that any freedom gained from an encounter with contingency and coincidence must deal with a potential backlash and strict isolation. This is the fate of Yu, who, like Yan, simply turns her back on the complexities of an environment saturated with communications devices. Others, like Wu, and the young niece, however, seem to revel in the new opportunities afforded through the technology, acting as if mobile technologies may in fact become a female technology capable of breaking apart the old cosmic order. Either way, what seems irrefutable in the film is that there is nothing light or easy about managing one's mobile life.

Chapter 6

The Double of Life of Vincent: The Uncanny Spaces of Modern Work in Laurent Cantet's *Time Out*

Introduction

Laurent Cantet's *Time Out* (L'Emploi du Temps) is an eerie and uncanny film which explores contemporary working conditions in Europe and the desperate, even psychotic lengths some will go to in order to maintain their identities as working members of society. Like his first feature film, *Human Resources* (Ressources Humaines), which examined capitalism's insidious role in disrupting and dividing families, *Time Out* explores the detrimental effects unemployment has on a middle-class family, as Vincent, the film's protagonist, spirals out of control when he loses his job. However, unlike *Human Resources*, which explores the working classes and the domestic problems that arise when a factory worker's son moves up the social hierarchy and is forced to implement measures that will make his father redundant, *Time Out* examines the plight of white collar workers, especially how job dissatisfaction and the fear of unemployment lead some to the brink of madness.

While *Time Out* and *Human Resources* use different social classes to explore the precarious nature of domestic life, both films nonetheless demonstrate how the family home is intimately linked to the world of capitalistic work. In short, in both films, the alienating effects of work lead to the (un)homely, a form of domestic destabilization that occurs when the pressures and stress of the work world seep over into the family sphere. Indeed, while *Time Out* moves away from the explicit question of working class estrangement, according to Bert Cardullo, Vincent's woes can still be read in

terms of the Marxist concern with capitalism's production of alienation. As Cardullo writes, "Without any plan to protect himself, with no rational reaction to his situation or prospects, Vincent thereby reveals himself, in this film that is hardly a Marxist tract, to be a white-collar instance of alienated, blue-collar, capitalist labor: someone, according to Marx, who produces something that is alien to him and his life; becomes alienated from himself because his work is not part of his life or takes it over entirely; and who, as a result, finds himself alienated from other human beings, with whom he no longer shares a social essence or of whose society he no longer feels a part" (2003:348).

While, as Cardullo suggests, parallels can be made between *Time Out* and the Marxist notion of alienation, in this chapter I will explore how the uncanny middle class home provides metaphors for life in the "risk society,"²⁷ especially in terms of the way market and political uncertainty creates the widespread fear of unemployment and job dissatisfaction. As Bauman writes, not only are risk and uncertainty widespread facets of contemporary life, but risk is the very product of modernity's excessive call to order:

As Ulrich Beck admirably showed in his description of the Risk Society, that 'archipelago' character of the modern social order(s) and the relative autonomy of

²⁷ The notion of the risk society has been advanced by a range of contemporary social and political thinkers; Giddens(1990;1991) Beck (1992;1999), and Bauman(1993;1995;2000;2001),for example, see risk as a product of the ordering and scientific pursuits of the industrial age. With the production of a wide range of new scientific thought, the bureaucratic management of nature and society and the division of society into a various independent parts, modern society emerged as complex system that is inherently prone to uncertain and undetectable risks. Yet while there is some common ground between these conceptions of the risk society, notable differences exist. Bauman, for example, sees the creation of the risk society in terms of the end of important collective institutions, like the family; furthermore without these grounding institutions, subjects end up in a precarious moral situation, where notions of right and wrong are left to isolated individuals; Giddens on the other hand does not seem to see individualization in this way; choice is not an empty and vacuous activity, but through different modes of self-reflexivity the subject can actively self-actualize new lifestyle decisions and ways of life.

every single island of order have created the man-made confusion which has by and large now replaced the 'natural confusion' which modernity set out to replace with the clarity and transparency of the thoroughly legislated order. We speak of 'risks' whenever it is impossible to precisely predict the outcome of actions we intend to undertake, and hence every decision is ambiguous, and every wish to act ambivalent; in other words, 'risk' stands for the incurable clarity of the situation. The present-day unclarity is itself a product of the urge to clarify; most of the acutely felt ambivalence stems today from the disparate and diffuse efforts to eliminate equivocality from selected, separate and always confined localities. But, as Beck convincingly argues, the continuous, expanding and redoubtable ambivalence ruling this Risk Society of ours has its uses. It lubricates the wheels of science and technology, the two major vehicles of contemporary development. It has itself become, to deploy another discredited modernist concept, a formidable agent of progress (2001:69).

Just as Bauman understands risk and uncertainty as the product of ordering the world, or the desire to eradicate ambivalence, I will show how Vincent's solution to the problem of work dissatisfaction and uncertainty actually leads him to a precarious encounter with the uncanny. That is, when Vincent decides to "drop out" of the work world, (in the beginning of the film we learn that Vincent has been fired and instead of telling his family he takes to the road and begins aimlessly driving around the French countryside), his rebellion only fosters more uncertainty, as his desire to escape the pressure of modern work creates a precarious home environment. This is found in the way that in order to cover up his unemployment, Vincent concocts a make believe job with the United Nations. However, since his job is fake Vincent must invent some way to meet the financial needs of his family. To do so, Vincent takes to the world of white collar crime and begins luring his closet friends and colleagues into a "risky but lucrative investment" scheme involving redevelopment in third world nations. Thus, while Vincent's double life begins as the search for a much needed "time out," in the end his retreat into a world of crime jeopardizes his home life.

In using the breakdown of the middle class home as an uncanny sign of the times, Cantet's evocation of the (un)homely represents a special case within the context of recent French film. According to Will Higbee, while many films bracketed under the banner of New Realism have sought to explore the issues of the contemporary (un)homely by focusing on more marginal social groups, like immigrants or the urban homeless, Cantet chooses more mainstream social groups to explore how working conditions can have a detrimental effect on home life. As Higbee writes:

Cantet's narratives, in contrast, are concerned with alienation of the white male working-class and middle-class professionals who form part of both the legitimate economy and the dominant societal norm in France. As such, it marks an important shift in the focus on marginal subjectivity in terms of ethnicity, class and gender when compared to that found in New Realism. This is not to suggest, however, that Cantet is unaware of the exclusion experienced by minority social groups. If anything, the fact that the director chooses to focus on two of the most integrated demographic groups within French society is a telling indictment of just how profound this sense of alienation or *fracture sociale* in contemporary French society is perceived to be"(2004:240).

As Higbee emphasizes, while Cantet's narratives of decline focus on more traditional institutions, like the middle class family, this mainstream territory does not prevent him from making poignant observations about how the conditions of contemporary work prove taxing on different social groups. Indeed, the fact that even dominant social groups can feel the unease of contemporary life shows just how widespread the reality of fear and risk is within modern working conditions, as even the "ideal family home" can fall victim to the disillusionment of the (un)homely. Furthermore, while one might think that a film about the family woes of a managerial worker might seem quite tedious, and incapable of striking a chord with the cultural imaginary, Cantet's bleak psychological portrait of the moral crisis experienced by Vincent, as he is no longer able to perform his role as patriarchal bread winner is at

times quite harrowing. Unlike more sensationalistic films set around the existential crisis of middle class men (*American Beauty*,²⁸ *Revolutionary Road*) *Time Out*'s poignancy arrives via its sparseness and minimalism, as if the film's style were directly co-related to the vacuous and empty life of Vincent. There are no dramatic suicide scenes, no intense and violent family fights; rather the film's non-action becomes even more unnerving as we are unable to fathom what could motivate Vincent to lead a double life that pushes the entire family to the breaking point.

For when Vincent is let go from his job, instead of confiding in his family, using the home as a way to rebound and resume his role in the working world, he abandons everything associated with the "standard" family home and retreats into a world of isolated individualism. In short, Vincent embodies what Paul Hopper calls 'detraditionalization and the rise of excessive individualism' – a process wherein previous institutions of authority, like the family home, are no longer principally responsible for socialization; rather social actions and norms are fostered through individualized social relations. "Above all," Hopper writes, "detraditionalization means no longer having to accept one's place" (2003:34). While, as Hopper notes, there are positive aspects to this rejection of one's social place, the process of detraditionalization can seriously undermine the formation and sustainability of collective units, like the family. As he writes:

²⁸ See for example Mike King's *The American Cinema of Excess: Extremes of the National Mind on Film*; King explores how many recent American films, like *American Beauty*, use shock and scandal to depict the "madness" of American society. On page 98, for example, King quotes one of the many reviews that see the film as an extreme depiction of American life: "For example Leonard Quart says of it: 'American Beauty provides the blackest of comic portraits of American suburban life. There is nothing nuanced about this film - over-the-top caricatures being the rule and the social reality of the suburbs reduced to a few motifs-cheerleaders, selling real estate, jogging, and growing roses. There is no reason to believe that the film's characters were ever happy and empathetic, and that the distorted and disconnected lives they now lead are a consequence of America's destructive values.'"

However, detraditionalization can also lead to greater individualism. This is because tradition is part of the collective conscience, or as Durkheim would have put it, 'the collective sentiments'; it is shared values and practices. Indeed, Durkheim believed that without this collective conscience there could be no society and social life would be impossible (Durkheim, 1961). With the erosion of tradition, the individual is less influenced or guided by the collective conscience. It means our decisions and behavior are no longer shaped to the same extent by reference to past collective experiences, nor to shared beliefs and cultural practices emanating from particular communities or societies' This can encourage each of us to develop a subjective morality, whereby our behavior and codes of conduct suit our own interests, and have little reference to the collective sentiments or conscience that go to make up a common moral culture. In this regard, Paul Heelas notes that detraditionalization is premised upon the notion that people no longer 'think of themselves as belonging to the whole' (2003:34-35).

In *Time Out*, Vincent's retreat from traditional forms of authority does not lead him to an enhanced form of subjective moral authority. In his rebellion from middle class conformity, Vincent does not break out of the repressive social norms associated with modern work and patriarchal authority. Rather, Vincent's excessive individualism leads to the destruction of the family unit (at one point Vincent's son refuses to eat dinner with his parents because his father makes him sick). As such, Vincent is not just a victim of the ambivalence of the risk society, but he becomes the very pathological agent of crisis and uncertainty that the home seeks to ward off. In short, Vincent's pathology involves an uncanny attack on his own family, as his make believe job leads him into a dangerous world of fabrication and deception: in order to take up his new job, he moves out of the family home, maintaining a strange and precarious existence on the road, living in a range of weird places from his car to an abandoned mountain cabin in Switzerland; he lies to his father in order to borrow money for a flat that doesn't exist; he scams his friends in order to support his family; and finally he hooks up and finds employment with a seedy bootlegger, who specializes in selling counterfeit products.

In *Time Out*, the (un)homely is a metaphor for the way the structure of late capitalism produces structural forms of uncertainty, uncanny imbalances that threaten social stability. By the uncanny I mean a general process of unsettling. As Nicholas Royle writes: “The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is experienced. Suddenly one’s sense of oneself...seems strangely questionable. The uncanny is the crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper, a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property, including the properness of names, one’s so-called ‘proper name,’ but also the proper names of others, of places, of institutions and events” (2003:1). For Vincent the disruption to the proper involves the loss that comes from losing one’s job, the loss that comes from no longer being considered the head of the household. No longer the breadwinner, no longer the provider whose role is to protect his family, Vincent unemployment is seen as a complex crisis in masculinity, as his proper role causes him to become a stranger in his own the home.

To elucidate Cantet’s portrait of capitalism’s hostile colonization of the life-world, I will provide a cartographic reading of Vincent’s self-delusional and pathological journey from the security net of the home to the uncertain spaces of simulation. Two kinds of homes will serve as the primary sites explored through my cartographic model: the first includes the traditional domestic sphere, which will be associated with fixity and spaces of enclosure; the second involves Vincent’s creation of a mobile home, an isolating space that will be associated with liminal spaces of transition. Within my reading these two cartographic variables will not remain independent, but the uncanny or (un)homely will emerge from a series of oscillations between these points, such that Vincent’s return to the home causes the familiarity of

the domestic sphere to be opened up to a potential attack by the bizarre and the strange.

Furthermore, just as *Cell Phone* showed how the de-localization of mobile technologies led to inter-marital deception, in *Time Out* the fragility of the home will in part be a product of Vincent's reliance on his mobile phone to connect to his family from a distance. That is, just as Yan was able to deceive his wife about his spatial whereabouts, for Vincent the mobile phone will serve as a contradictory umbilical cord: on one hand, the phone will allow him to retain some control over the home, as he uses it to contact family members from a series of remote and distanced spaces; on the other hand, the flexibility and freedom afforded by mobile technologies will assist in covering up his double life, as his undetectable location allows him to perpetuate his game of simulation. Finally, this cartographic reading will be categorized in terms of three distinct narrative phases, moments in the film which all rest on a common experience of "falling." These phases include: departing from the security of work, wandering through the simulacrum, and returning to the home as a stranger.

Movement 1: (unemployment and the experience of free-fall)

When Vincent is fired from his job, he experiences a devastating fall within the social order. Unemployed, Vincent is tossed out, suddenly disengaged from a social network in which one's productive contribution to the economy represents a capitalistic orthodoxy. His failure though is not one of those self-revelatory moments, where one's defeat acts a catapult, providing the courage and self-determination to return to the work force with an added vigor and enthusiasm. Rather, in losing his job, Vincent loses a way of life, an identity and important access to other forms of social and cultural capital. As such, to prove incapable of following the capitalist

orthodoxy, to find oneself unable to face the daily grind of work and responsibility results in the free-fall feeling of absolute failure. As Bauman writes, in today's liquid society sole responsibility for "the good life" befalls to the lone subject. To fail at anything, such as work or health, means to accept full responsibility for one's lack of accomplishment. Put another way, in order to function in the hyper-individualized society, one should always realize that when one falls there will never be anyone there to catch you:

Let there be no mistake: now, as before - in the fluid and light as much as in the solid and heavy stage of modernity - individualization is a fate, not a choice. In the land of the individual freedom of choice the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is emphatically not on the agenda. The individual's self-containment and self-sufficiency may be another illusion: that men and women have no one to blame for their frustrations and troubles does not need now to mean, any more than it did in the past, that they can protect themselves against frustration using their own domestic appliances or pull themselves out of trouble, Baron Munchausen style, by their bootstraps. And yet, if they fall ill, it is assumed that this has happened because they were not resolute and industrious enough in following their health regime; if they stay unemployed, it is because they failed to learn the skills of gaining an interview, or because they did not try hard enough to find a job or because they are, purely and simply, work-shy; if they are not sure about their career prospects and agonize about their future, it is because they are not good enough at winning friends and influencing people and failed to learn and master, as they should have done, the arts of self-expression and impressing others (2001:34).

In many ways, *Time Out* can be read as an intimate portrait of one of those damned subjects who are unable to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps; however, what is most interesting about this film about failure is not merely the fact that Vincent hits rock bottom. What is devastating about Vincent's joblessness is not simply that he feels isolated and alone and is unable to confide in his family or ask them for support. Rather the uncanny facet of the narrative is the pathological way in which Vincent desires to escape once and for all the world of modern work. Near the end of the film, this disavowal of the orthodoxy of work is expressed poignantly

through the story Vincent tells the seedy businessman Jean-Michel about his love of driving.

After experiencing many unfulfilled years as a financial consultant, Vincent explains, he realized that his only satisfaction came from his commute to work. Driving became his only freedom! Soon this obsession with driving started interfering with his work habits, as he would drive up to 200 km just to meet with a single client. Often, he would not even have the courage to show up to his meetings, choosing instead to keep driving, wandering aimlessly around the French countryside. With most of his work day spent driving, it was not long before Vincent's boss reproached him for his lack of loyalty to the company. In the end, Vincent says somberly, his departure was easily negotiated.

Unable to reform to the expectations and conditions of modern work, Vincent's fall from the social world is absolute. Unlike many unemployed workers, whose fall from the productive world represents a case of bad luck or a momentary set back, Vincent's fall represents a wholesale rejection of the system, a disavowal of his middle class masculinity. But while Vincent will use an assortment of lies to buy him some much needed time away from the pressures and uncertainty of work, his double life comes at a cost. In order to act out his middle class rebellion, Vincent must sacrifice his family life; in order to escape his work he must simultaneously become a stranger, a foreigner whose inability to come to terms with his failure slowly seeps a poison into the family sphere: his son comes to hate him, refusing to participate in any family outings; his wife, Muriel, becomes literally sick from her husband's strange behavior, even coming to fear him and what he might do to the family; even his father,

the only one perhaps who shows some sympathy towards Vincent's plight, is unable to fathom the lengths Vincent goes to in order to conceal his unemployment.

Like the disturbed family members, the viewer's position throughout the film coalesces around the desire to know what could have led Vincent to this point of mental crisis. Indeed, near the end of the film, when Muriel and the rest of the family finally confront Vincent about his double life, the viewer is not given any closure or reassurance. Vincent does not, after all, confess his wrongdoing and become stitched back into the family. Rather Vincent's containment by the home only causes him to act out erratically: surrounded by his family, unable to deal with the pressure of parental responsibility, Vincent continues his act of rebellion, escaping the home through an open window, like a burglar fleeing the scene of a crime.

Vincent then jumps in his car and takes to the road, the only place in which he seems to find any solace. Eventually, Vincent will leave his vehicle by the side of the road and, as we hear the voice of Muriel on his car phone, will walk out towards the darkness, eventually disappearing into the night. Here, Vincent's movement into darkness forms the central metaphor for his moral and mental journey: empty, vacuous, almost indecipherable, Vincent remains an enigma throughout the film. For if, as Noel Carroll (1991) writes, the natural order of the family is signaled in film by its eventual closure, by the restoration of the home by the male hero, in *Time Out* we will not be given any kind of reprieve, as Vincent's collapse remains an inexplicable sign that will not be deciphered.

However, while the film will not resolve Vincent's crisis, the film does leave us with some clues as to why Vincent retreats into a world of mistrust and pathological lying, clues moreover that takes us beyond treating Vincent's mental collapse as a

question of individual morality. Vincent's inability to protect the family and restore it to its "natural order" is not simply a matter of moral deficiency. Such a reading misses the deeply systemic character of the problems of modern work, and the ways in which Vincent's anxiety over the colonization of the life-world represents a general social malaise. This, I believe, is where the power and poignancy of Cantet's film is located. As a disturbing portrait of the systemic ways in which the current working orthodoxy produces the alienable, shameful conditions of falling, Cantet's film explores what many theorists, like Ulrich Beck, David Harvey and Zygmunt Bauman, see as the inherent risk contained in postmodern societies.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, for example, David Harvey discusses a Post-Fordist regime of capitalistic accumulation, whereby the Fordist system of industrialization is displaced by a global economy made possible by innovations in communication technologies and cybernetics. For Harvey, whereas the industrial age centered on the rigid production and consumption of material goods, the post-Fordist condition relies on a process of fluidification, wherein the accelerated processing and circulation of information and consumer goods become the structuring activity of late capitalism. Furthermore, under the work conditions of flexible accumulation, labor processes, and global markets all become more versatile, as skills and consumption habits shift rapidly.

While the social implications of the process of fluidification are quite extensive, one of the major implications of the fluid society is the demand for a flexible labor force that must continually reformulate itself to meet the demands of an ever-changing consumer society. These conditions create what Beck refers to as the "new political economy of insecurity," whereby temporary and contractual jobs, which

perpetually require new and quite often mundane skills, replace full-time stable employment (Shilling, 85). Along with an increased sense of insecurity, the contemporary worker is also burdened by more work hours, greater responsibility, and less free time. Subsequently, these added duties lead to a condition in which workers literally feel like they are running out of time.

For many theorists, then, risk and uncertainty are the operative words defining the structure of contemporary working society. But as Zygmunt Bauman writes, despite a social reality in which responsibility for problems in housing, security and the economy fall to the lone individual, the "risk society" has little to do with individual choice, as if the subject could remedy the problems of modern societies via individual acts. Rather risk and uncertainty are inherent features of the system. Sharing Bauman's concern with modernity's constitution as a high-risk historical process, Ulrich Beck writes: "Risk may be defined as a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (1996:21). And: "In contrast to all earlier epochs (including industrial society), the risk society is characterized essentially by a lack: the impossibility of an external attribution of hazards. In other words, risks depend on decisions, they are industrially produced and in this sense politically reflexive" (1996:183). Even more, risk is not always seen as negative value. Rather, periodic moments of crisis can prove quite productive, as speculative markets, new technologies, uncertain housing situations and other high stakes decisions become core processes in the functioning of late capitalism.

According to Will Higbee, Cantet's exploration of workplace uncertainty would have been quite palpable for viewers in France. As the country experienced significance political and economic turmoil during the 1990s, widespread fear of

joblessness became the norm for most of French society. Commenting on this political and economic uncertainty, Higbee writes that this period involved one "compounded by periodic shifts in government from left to right wing and the continued restructuring of labour-market policies in response to both internal pressures on the welfare state and the external forces of globalization...

Unsurprisingly, unemployment – or, more accurately, a fear of joblessness – remained one of the most salient political issues during the 1990s. In this respect, with their focus on a shifting and uncertain economic climate in which its protagonists are also the victims of the social and psychological fallout from unemployment, *Ressources humaines* and *Emploi du temps* articulate a sense of anxiety experienced at virtually all levels of contemporary French society" (2004:239).

A Rebellion in Masculinity: The Suffocating Spaces of the Domestic Home

Interestingly, while Vincent's "time out" can be read as a response to the conditions of risk inherent in contemporary societies, Vincent's solution ends up creating more ambivalence, as if there were no way out of the trap of the modern uncanny. As such, at the center of *Time Out* is an unresolvable narrative problem: while Vincent's previous job is meaningless and represents a problem that will ideally be solved through the narrative, the film instead depicts the solution in terms of an uncanny case of déjà vu. That is, rather than the narrative providing the time and space for Vincent to work out his moral crisis and return him to his place as Parental Authority, Vincent's journey actually positions him back within the same high risk orbit. In short, in order to escape his alienating world, Vincent must return to the initial scene of disorder. For despite all Vincent's adolescent joy over his new job, in reality his new work life is completely contrived. For isn't the immense satisfaction he

feels for his new job completely feigned. Thus, instead of finding a new work environment that would complete Vincent's identity, the solution to the burden of modern work only exasperates Vincent's problems, as it forces him to compromise himself by simulating joy and satisfaction.

This contradictory or false problem is succinctly expressed in one of the first scenes, in which Vincent attempts to convince one of his friends to invest in his high risk developmental projects. In the scene, the viewer is invited to consider how the contemporary home is incapable of remedying the problems of work, as the stressful realities of work seep into and contaminate the home. But oddly while this picture of the colonized home aptly describes Vincent's situation, in the scene this image of the precarious home is transferred to the friend. While Vincent boasts passionately about his fantastic new job, as if his new work environment had just saved him from some devastating middle class crisis, the friend remains impassive, pessimistic and self-degrading, as he discusses his inability to find a place of refuge, a safe haven away from his work identity.

One cannot, in the words of the friend, escape the total dissatisfaction of work, its trivialities, and lack of meaningful accomplishments. Home is no option, since it just reminds him of all the things he has not become. Rather, for the friend, the solution to the domination of work is to live a life on the surface of things, to forget one's existential angst in pursuit of cheap thrills. "I go out after work," says the friend, "and treat myself to some luxury. But in the end I am reminded that all these things cost money." Interestingly, the friend's solution to the problem of work is very much like Vincent's. Like the friend, who is pulled back into the reality of work, since

his solution costs money, Vincent's simulated job merely places him in an even more precarious situation as he returns to an even more high-stakes work environment.

Like that of his friend, Vincent's home seems incapable of freeing him from the realities of work. Constantly afraid that he will disappoint his wife and father, that he will be unable to live up to the role of middle class patriarch, Vincent sees the home more as a space of forceful confinement than a site of relaxation, freedom and domestic enjoyment. Yet while Vincent clearly disdains the whole situation of modern work, he still decides to play the role of domestic protector, continuing to work despite its devastating effect on his social and psychological life. According to Will Higbee, this inability to escape the role of "dissatisfied worker" has to do with the engulfing and entrapping powers of the private sphere. In short, Vincent is unable to escape his alienated life because he is unable to escape the parental and domineering influence of his father. As Higbee writes,

In *Emploi du temps*, it becomes apparent that much of the pressure for Vincent to maintain the pretense of continued affluence and professional success comes from his father. Vincent, in turn, reproduces the same patterns of behaviour in the relationship with his own, increasingly rebellious, elder son: just as his father writes a cheque for Vincent to pay for the deposit on the imaginary flat in Geneva, so Vincent in turn gives a FF500 note to his son (Vincendeau, 2002: 32). By the end of the film it is the pressure of bourgeois expectation to maintain the trappings of professional success and affluence – articulated most intensely not through his wife but through the father – that pushes Vincent to breaking point (2004:242).

But if for Vincent the pressures of living up to his father's version of patriarchy prevents him from finding the right work and home environment, the film does offer a brief but succinct glimpse into an alternative domestic life, one where being a man has nothing to do with sacrificing one's individual identity. This home involves Vincent's old friend Nono. When Nono hears about Vincent's investment scheme, for example, he decides to call Vincent personally, hoping to cash in on

Vincent's new job. But when Vincent arrives at his friend's home he is surprised by what he finds. Unlike his other middle class friends, who are quite successful and capable of investing large amounts of money, Nono clearly falls outside the bourgeois order. Indeed, as Vincent comes to learn, Nono does not even occupy the same world of masculinity as Vincent, as he is a stay-at-home dad, who lets his wife take care of providing the family income. Even more surprising for Vincent is the way Nono's home has been transformed into a space of personal enjoyment and creativity. Using one of the bedrooms as an amateur musical studio, Nono's home is presented as a space far from the rigid and domineering world of masculinity Vincent inherits from his father; rather the home is a place in which Nono can resume his creative pursuits. Thus, unlike Vincent, Nono seems to have found the right balance between the responsibilities of work and the need to sustain his individual creativity.

For Vincent this happy home seems to be precisely what he desires. This envy can be seen in the way that Nono is the only friend that Vincent doesn't deceive, as Vincent decides to actually repay Nono with interest. Thus in sharp contrast to the middle class world that Vincent belongs, where status is everything, Nono occupies an alternative home life, one where the family is not seen as a vacated space of unwanted responsibility. As Judith Franco writes:

Vincent's moral superiority is established primarily in relation to other male characters. Whereas the fantasist has no scruples about defrauding his carefully selected bourgeois victims, an unexpected confrontation with Nono (Maxime Sassier), a devoted family man who entrusts Vincent with his savings without demanding a receipt, brings about a moral awakening. Nono, Vincent's former school friend, represents an alternative type of masculinity and lifestyle associated with simplicity and authenticity that contrasts sharply with the middle-class emphasis on status and appearances. Nono spends his days making music and looking after his young daughter while his wife goes off to work. At one point, Vincent is shown gazing longingly from a distance at this idyllic family, and he quickly repays Nono's investment with interest (2008:39)

This brief glimpse into Nono's home invites the viewer to consider how work and domestic roles are heavily influenced by gender. Yet, despite this promising look at the way gender types can be reversed, the film does not provide much support for its female characters. In short, *Time Out* is a film about a crisis in masculinity. This emphasis on the film's exclusive examination of the problems of masculinity can be seen in Franco's reading, where the whole matter of work is reduced to the problems of men. Nowhere do we find a sympathetic reading of how women must cope with the risks inherent in the contemporary world. We are never invited to explore how Vincent's wife, Muriel, has managed to maintain her personal identity, having to both raise a family and work as a school teacher. Indeed, as a working woman, who is held responsible for not only her own satisfaction, but the wellbeing of the entire family, Muriel faces the extra burden of being a woman, mother and wife. When Muriel confesses that her life as a school teacher has become burdensome, since she faces greater responsibilities, Muriel clearly indicates that, like Vincent, she too suffers from the malaise of modern work. But when Vincent declares that she should just give up her job and pursue her inner desires, Vincent is forced to contend with the way in which freedom from the domestic sphere is highly dependent on gender. "What about the children and the home," Muriel bluntly replies, "who is going to take care of these duties if we are both out pursuing our dreams."

Thus, while Cantet's exploration of the destabilization of dominant social institutions clearly underscores the widespread reach of the precarious nature of modern work, greater attention to capitalism's gender inequalities is required to show the multiple forms of injustice that arise from modern labor processes. Denied access

to the freedom of pursuing her inner passions, Muriel's minor role within the film speaks perhaps of a harsher cruelty that not even Vincent's crisis can encapsulate.

Movement 2 (free-fall in reverse: orbiting as an escape from the ground of reality)

When Vincent is fired from his job, he experiences a devastating fall from the social order. However, Vincent's free-fall does not entail a sudden and immediate plummet to the ground, a jolting call to reality wherein his problems with work are brought to the attention of his family and friends. Rather, Vincent's free-fall is avoided through an anti-gravitational detour through the fantastic and delusional. By creating a simulated double life, whereby the reality of unemployment is transformed into a high profile career, Vincent's response to the trauma of social dejection depends on keeping "the Real" at bay, a process however that proves untenable for Vincent, as his secret life ends up evoking a weird encounter with the uncanny.

In this section, I will look at how Vincent's double life represents the need to retreat into a safety zone of individual pleasure, a fabricated elsewhere where lost time can be regained and the dissatisfaction of modern work can be transformed through the powers of fabulation. However, while Vincent's 'time out' will begin as a temporary leave of absence from the spaces of work, throughout the narrative this detour through the fantastic will create a series of uncertain oscillations, whereby Vincent's perpetual border crossings between his domestic home and his precarious life of transience will transform him into a perplexed stranger that troubles the boundaries of his home and undermines the security of his family.

As the film's title indicates Cantet's story centers on the question of time, especially the ways in which duration in modern society has been colonized by the experience of work. Unlike the original French title *L'Emploi du Temps* (The Use of

Time) wherein time is understood as an indistinct opening, a duration which can be put to many uses, the English translation conjures up two other readings of time that call upon the film's deeper themes. On the one hand, "time out" can refer to the play time of children, the temporality of games, whereby the so-called parameters of the real are momentarily removed so that time is consumed through more frivolous or playful activities. On the other hand, "time out" or "out of time" indicates a lack, the dreadful feeling of running out of time or never being able to accomplish a set of goals within a required time frame. Interestingly both notions of time are instrumental to understanding Vincent's crisis: trapped in a dead-end job that provides little personal freedom or time, Vincent's recourse to the playfulness of fantasy stems from the need to take an individual time out, to create an opening in time, in which its use is no longer dominated by modern work.

One of the first indications of Vincent's desire for a personal "time out" is presented through the figures of the automobile and driving. As the film opens we find Vincent sleeping in his automobile in some undisclosed location. Since the windows of the car remain fogged up, the only space visible to the viewer is the inside of the car. Subsequently, our first encounter with Vincent involves a situation where the external world is rendered indecipherable, a nonexistent space that, like the reality of work, must be hermetically sealed off. Like other films analyzed in this dissertation, the opening of *Time Out* makes it immediately apparent that this will be a film about the importance of boundaries, of upholding and dissolving the border between inside and outside, home and work, and reality and fantasy. And like those other films, the clear cut division between any of these spaces is always precarious at best, as the

internal spaces of the self and home are incapable of being purified from the external world.

As this opening scene makes clear, by focusing on a purified zone of interiority, the car can be read as Vincent's disavowal of the outside, as he retreats further and further into his own isolated space of fantasy. Indeed, as we will see, the car will form one of the most important signs in the film, as it comes to represent Vincent's desire to escape the containment of the domestic home and continue his pursuit of freedom, excitement and refuge. As much research on the material and cultural significance of automobiles makes clear, automobiles function much more than mere modes of transport; nor are they simply rationalized technologies that escape various social, embodied, psychological and cultural significations.²⁹ As Mini Sheller writes about recent research on car cultures:

Cars are above all machines that move people, but they do so in many senses of the word. Recent approaches to the phenomenology of car-use have highlighted 'the driving body' as a set of social practices, embodied dispositions, and physical affordances (Dant and Martin 2001; Dant, forthcoming; Edensor 2002; Sheller and Urry 2000; Thrift 2003; Oldrup, forthcoming). This work shifts our attention away from the rational actor making carefully reasoned practical and economic choices and towards the lived experience of dwelling with cars in all of its complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction. More encompassing approaches to car cultures are also found in the anthropology of material culture (Miller 2001a). This article builds both on this work and on recent approaches in the sociology of emotions (Hochschild 1983, 1997, 2003; Bendelow and Williams 1998; Katz 2000; Goodwin et al. 2001) to explore the ways in which the 'dominant culture of automobility' is implicated in a deep context of affective and embodied relations between people, machines and spaces of mobility and dwelling, in which emotions and the senses play a key part (Sheller and Urry 2000; Urry 2000) (2004:221).

²⁹ For a more thorough overview of the cultural and social significance of car cultures see Sachs' *For Love of the Automobile. Looking Back into the History of Our Desires*, Brandon's *Auto Mobile: How the Car Changed Life*, Miller's *Car Cultures* and Featherstone, Thrift and Urry's *Automobilities*.

As Sheller goes on to suggest there are many facets of automobiles that can have an impact on the emotional, social and cultural life of people. For John Urry perhaps one of the most salient features about car cultures is the way automobilities led to feelings of freedom, as the motility afforded by the car allows the driver to easily traverse a range of spaces without worrying about restrictive time tables:

Automobility is a source of freedom, the 'freedom of the road'. Its flexibility enables the car-driver to travel at any time in any direction along the complex road systems of western societies that link together most houses, workplaces and leisure sites (and are publicly paid for). Cars extend where people can go to and hence what they are literally able to do. Much 'social life' could not be undertaken without the flexibilities of the car and its 24-hour availability. It is possible to leave late by car, to miss connections, to travel in a relatively time-less fashion (2004:28).

But along with this ability to enhance the driver's feeling of auto-freedom, automobilities need to be understood in terms of the way mobility is co-joined with the enhancement of privation. That is, rather than foster more communal ways of navigating the environment, car cultures are deeply insular. Quoting Freund, Urry writes, "[M]odernist urban landscapes were built to facilitate automobility and to discourage other forms of human movement. [Movement between] private worlds is through dead public spaces by car' (2004:30." And [The car] exerts "spatial and temporal dominance over surrounding environments, transforming what can be seen, heard, smelt and tasted (the spatial and temporal range of which varies for each of the senses). They are sites of mobility within which car drivers are insulated as they 'dwell-within-the-car'. They represent the victory of liquidity over the 'urban'" (2004:30).

In the opening scene of *Time Out* this insular world of the auto is brought into focus, as the car comes to provide Vincent with a kind of sensory-deprived retreat from the world. Taking a more Freudian perspective on the scene, Franco comments that this opening scene represents Vincent's retreat into a maternal space of plentitude,

as the fog enclosed car represents a “comfortable womb-like space that shields him from the outside world” (38). The maternal overtones of this quite are important. The car will not simply be seen as the emblem of Vincent’s childish pursuit of freedom, it is not merely a way to escape the troubles of the world. Rather the car represents a new kind of mobile home, a space of refuge that both promotes and disavows those domestic connotations (protection, family, caring) commonly associated with dwelling places.

For, on one hand, the car provides Vincent with a quick and mobile way to travel back and forth between his pseudo work life in Switzerland and his home with his wife and children. As such, the car serves a domestic function, allowing him contact his distant family. On the other hand, the car serves an insular function. Freed from the pressures of family and friends, not confined to the responsibilities of domestic life, the car becomes for Vincent a nomadic dwelling space, an isolated and private enclosure that captures perfectly Freund’s contention that the car serves to sever the drivers from the world of collective public spaces.

As a transport technology, the car’s status as a dwelling place depends on the protective functions of the automobile; but what must also be underscored is its use as emblem of liberation, freedom and speed. Indeed, if the car for Vincent is a kind of home, it is one that coalesces around the art of joy riding. As I already discussed, Vincent’s employment problems emerged when he began driving aimlessly around the French country-side. When Vincent is fired, and the suffocating timetable of work is lifted, this passion quickly turns into a pathological obsession, as driving, smoking cigarettes, and listening to music on the car radio become the only activities capable of making Vincent happy. This regressive thrill in driving is explicitly demonstrated in

one of the opening scenes when Vincent spots a speeding train in the distance and pretends that he is in a race (here we find a perfect illustration of the way the privatized nature of the automobile is pitted against more communal modes of transport). Revving the engine, smiling with child-like enthusiasm, Vincent speeds off in hot pursuit of the train, oblivious to the fact that he has just been fired and that his aimless road trips are made possible only through a reckless series of elaborate lies. The scene ends with the painful reminder that all notions of personal freedom can be made only against the back drop of responsibility. Forced to stop at a red light and let the train pass by, Vincent acknowledges the limits of his recklessness, the fact that the burden of social shame cannot be vanquished with children's games. Defeated and dejected, Vincent's brief moment of jubilation quickly vanishes.

As Urry and others indicate, personal liberty and freedom is a well-known facet of the automobile. What is interesting about Cantet's exploration of the liberating appeal of automotive technologies, however, are the ways in which Vincent's regressive love of driving is undeniably pedestrian and benign. Other than the brief exhilarating race with the train, Vincent's automotive fetish lacks any gusto or energy. Rather, his auto-desire leads the spectator on a banal journey through a series of indistinct non-places involving monotonous freeways, service stations, and roadside hotels. This detour through the non-place is saliently expressed in the opening shots of the film. As mentioned above, the film opens with Vincent slumped over asleep in the passenger seat of his car. The windows are foggy and as the condensation slowly evaporates the outside environment is revealed. However, even though the windows become clear, the viewer is not given any specific clues as to Vincent's actual spatial

location. Rather, as Vincent sleeps on the side of freeway somewhere in France, his life on the road rests on encountering the indistinguishable reality of non-places.

However, while *Time Out* provides numerous images of Augé's non-places, I do not think we get very far by applying Augé's definition to Vincent's desire for a mobile home. Rather I think a more applicable definition of the non-place comes from Gilles Deleuze. In his book *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, Deleuze describes a form of cinema in which space becomes unhinged from any definable location. Referring to the works of Bresson, Deleuze argues that there are times in the cinema when the succession of images does not give us a well-defined, actualized location, but indeterminable and abstract spaces that are "any-space-whatevers," a term that Deleuze borrows from a Pascal Augé:

Space is no longer a particular determined space, it has become any-space-whatever [espace quelconque, to use Pascal Augé's term. Certainly, Bresson does not invent any-space-whatevers (although he constructs them on his own account and in his own way). Augé would prefer to look for their source in the experimental cinema. But it could equally be said that they are as old as the cinema itself. Any-space-whatever is not an abstract universal, in all times, in all places. It is a perfectly singular space, which has merely lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its own parts, so 'that the linkages can be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual connection, grasped as pure locus of the possible. What in fact manifests the instability, the heterogeneity, the absence of link of such a space, is a richness in potentials or singularities which are, as it were, prior conditions of all actualisation, all determination (1986:109).

It is unclear if Deleuze is referring to Marc Augé in this quote, since Deleuze doesn't cite any specific sources. Even critics seem unable to track down this Pascal Augé and often refer to Deleuze's concept in terms of the French anthropologist Marc Augé, without noting the discrepancy. Whether or Deleuze has in fact erroneously referred to Marc Augé is perhaps not the most pressing matter, since it seems that Augé's non-place does not have much in common with Deleuze's 'any-space-

whatever.’ While both terms indicate a lack of definable characteristics and a de-contextualization of space, for Deleuze the any-space-whatever is a space that abounds in pure potentiality. Whereas for Augé non-places, like supermarkets and freeways, represent a homogenization of experience, for Deleuze the any-space-whatever represents the infinite powers of the virtual.³⁰ Since the viewer is unable to locate a series of images, to pinpoint their exact geographic parameters, space becomes unmoored, indeterminate and thus capable of becoming virtually anything and anywhere.

With respect to Vincent, I think Deleuze’s definition is far more appropriate. While Vincent may make his home in various generic places, these locations are never for Vincent actualized or determined spaces; it makes little difference if Vincent sleeps in the parking lot of a supermarket or a motel. On the contrary, for the delusional Vincent, whose job involves fabricating stories that take him away from reality, the non-place is a site of perpetual fantasy, an elsewhere that allows Vincent to live out his double life. Indeed, as Will Higbee writes, Vincent’s life trip through the non-place can be understood as a passage through spaces of crisis that allows Vincent to work out his dilemma in identity:

Whereas in *Ressources humaines* social conflict and crisis are negotiated directly within the domestic sphere (the family home), in *Emploi du temps* Vincent is forced ‘elsewhere’ (motorway service stations, hotel lobbies) in his attempts to resolve the crisis, ultimately seeking retreat in the deserted log cabin in the Swiss mountains. These ‘other spaces’ thus function as what Foucault termed ‘crisis heterotopias’ (1986: 24) – a distant or removed place or location that allows sacred or forbidden acts to be performed outside the social space they affect in order for a certain ‘crisis’ to be resolved (2004:246).

³⁰ For a detailed analysis of Deleuze’s notion of virtuality and its relationship to the ‘any space whatever’ see Rodowick’s *Gilles Deleuze’s Time Machine*.

If for Vincent the non-place is a fantastic space that falls outside the social order, a space that enables him to buy some time and escape from the domineering world of work identity, the question that remains is this: has the crisis heterotopia performed its function? Have the powers of potentiality cited by Deleuze allowed Vincent to work through his crisis of masculinity? In part I already answered this question earlier, when I described Vincent's solution to the problem of work as an impossible solution: by returning to the workforce through a simulated job, Vincent's crisis heterotopia quite simply does not solve anything. Rather, in direct opposition to the 'any-space-whatever,' Vincent comes to determine and actualizes what could have been left indeterminate, thus precipitating the need for another "time out."

Cellphone Connections? -A Home Away From Home

While a state of limbo defines the earlier scenes of Vincent and his aimless road-trips, Vincent's autonomy and freedom are still strained by the expectation to remain accountable to the home. That is, no matter how far Vincent's mobile home drifts away from his domestic life, Vincent is still grounded by the responsibilities of family. A pivotal scene that explores these two tendencies again occurs in the opening shots of Vincent sleeping in his car. As the fog subsides, and the external world is revealed, Vincent is awakened by a call from Muriel on his mobile phone. Muriel, it seems, has called to check in on her busy husband and to see if he will be home for dinner. Vincent, of course, lies, saying that he has a busy day ahead of him and will be late arriving home. If for Vincent the retreat into the fantastic rests on the ability to keep the home at bay, the film shows how the presence of mobile technologies will make this task improbable: by making Vincent available to his family, even when he is on the road or living abroad, the mobile phone will serve as a domestic umbilical cord,

allowing Muriel to keep tabs on her husband and preventing him from becoming totally enveloped in his double life.

Yet, while the mobile phone can be read as a “grounding agent” that brings Vincent back to the reality of his domestic responsibilities, the mode of communication afforded by mobile devices will render the linkage between Vincent and the home unreliable. As we saw in *Cell Phone*, since mobile devices allow communication from a distance without providing the user with the exact whereabouts of the other caller, Muriel’s use of the phone to keep tabs on her husband will prove tenuous. She may be able to get him on the line, even follow the progress of his day, but his “absent presence” will prevent her from really disclosing his true whereabouts.

Indeed, just as the automobile is doubly coded for Vincent, becoming both a space of enclosure and a mobile technology, the delocalization of mobile communications will render them Vincent’s ideal technology. On the one hand, the device offers Vincent minimal proximity to his family, allowing him to be available to his family but in a very limited and partial way, choosing when and where he can be contacted. On the other hand, the domestic function of the phone is complemented by its use as a form of personal freedom. In short, by living a double life on the road, the cellphone provides Vincent with the freedom to roam aimlessly, becoming unhinged from the territory of the home without anyone ever knowing his exact whereabouts. The question that arises throughout, though, is this: is the phone for Vincent an Ideal Hollywood Phone? And if so does Vincent avoid the pitfalls of disclosure and coincidence that plagued Yan’s mobile life?

In contrast to Yan's disconcerting experience with communicative mobility, Vincent's command and control of his mobile life is, initially anyway, foolproof. Unlike Yan, who constantly leaves his phone around the home, allowing his wife access to his secret life, Vincent's does not seem to be burdened by the heaviness of mobile networks. Since Vincent spends most of his time outside the spaces of the home, there is little worry about misplacing his phone or his wife accessing his private life. Even more, as a business manager who is responsible for managing people and resources, Vincent seems like the ideal candidate capable of pulling off such a prolific scam. This managerial prowess is succinctly evoked by Vincent's decision to actually relocate to Switzerland.

When Vincent tells friends and family that he has secured a high profile job at the UN in Switzerland, for example, I was struck by the fact that he actually relocates to Geneva. If the UN job is nonexistent and his mobile phone allows him to travel aimlessly without his actual whereabouts being detected, why does Vincent decide to actually relocate to another country, spending his time between France and Switzerland? What purpose could be behind the attempt to actualize the fantastic? Of course, the relocation could be seen as a symptom of Vincent's delusions, as the journey to Switzerland makes the job feel somehow more real, more in line with his virtual reality. A better interpretation I think is that Vincent's life as a manager prepares him for all the necessary tasks and duties that will allow him to pull off his game of deceit. As Bert Cardullo writes, "Cantet makes the subversive point that his protagonist is able to pull off this pretense, this virtuoso duplicity, because, as a manager, he was trained essentially to do nothing except manage other people, to manage his own techniques or "people skills," as it were. Instead of employees, he

now "manages" his wife, his children, his friends, even his own parents; and, since his white-collar job existed mostly in his mind anyway, Vincent has gone so far as to eliminate that troublesome middleman, his employer" (2003:346).

In line with this argument we can say that Vincent's move to Switzerland is logistically sound, since as any good criminal knows, a crucial part of remaining undetected involves covering all your tracks and getting a solid lay of the land, so to speak. Unlike Yan, then, who seems incapable of realizing that the "space-less" nature of mobile networks are in fact heavily related to specific locations, such as the home, Vincent is constantly on-guard, fully aware that in order to pull off his deception he will have to become familiar with the very spaces and people of his fantasy, spaces furthermore that will provide him with some kind of alibi. This requirement is evidenced in the scene when Muriel takes a quick visit to Vincent's new apartment. As we learn, Vincent does not actually spend his father's money on a new apartment but uses it to buy a new SUV. After all, Vincent has very little use for an apartment when he has his own version of a mobile home. But when Muriel demands to see his new flat, Vincent is faced with a dilemma. How can he avoid taking Muriel to an apartment that doesn't exist? To solve this problem Vincent has to think fast. Using his knowledge of the area he decides to take Muriel to an old abandoned mountain cabin that Vincent came across earlier while doing some off-roading in his new vehicle. Even more, when Vincent picks up Muriel at the airport, his managerial skills come in handy, as he is able to convince her that going to his apartment is not as exciting as a weekend out in the wilderness. "I don't even have any cookware," he declares - as if the apartment's lack of domestic accessories would repel Muriel from wanting to go through with the visit.

Most important in these scenes is the way the reference to Vincent's desolate apartment and the abandoned old cabins provide the viewer with tangible sites that reinforce Vincent's contradictory mobile relationship to his home. In one scene Cantet uses the lone, isolated Swiss mountains to represent Vincent solitary and insular life of homelessness. When Muriel and Vincent leave the cabin and make their way back to the car, for example, a blanket of fog sweeps in from the mountains, enveloping the two in a thick and opaque cloud. Unable to see anything around him, Vincent suddenly becomes extremely desperate, calling out frantically for Muriel as though the fog had taken his wife from him. The scene culminates with Muriel, who has been located finally by her husband, pronouncing an eerie statement that will echo throughout the film "Did you think that you had lost me?" As in the opening scene, the fog in this scene provides a poignant metaphor for Vincent's frayed relationship with his wife and their strange mobile connectivity. Absent but present, near and far, Muriel's envelopment in the fog functions exactly like the disembodied voice that is repeatedly heard over Vincent's mobile phone line.

As already mentioned, Vincent uses his managerial prowess to maintain his double life. But Vincent's ability to avoid detection will only last so long. Just like Yan, whose mobile life betrays him in the end, as he is unable to command and control his mobile phone, Vincent's double life also unravels through the contingent powers of telephone technologies. In the film this power surrounds Vincent's former friend and colleague, Jeffrey. As a friend concerned about Vincent's well-being, Jeffrey is seen periodically in the film inquiring about Vincent's situation. In one scene, Vincent encounters Jeffrey and his family by chance while both families are out shopping. As expected, Jeffrey acts concerned and tries to probe Vincent about how

he is doing. But Vincent will have none of his pity. Dragging Jeffrey outside the store, he proceeds to give his friend a good tongue lashing, demanding that he stay away from his family. But, as we will see, eradicating the coincidental will not be any easy matter.

Indeed, when Jeffrey begins calling Vincent's home, it will be Jeffrey's disembodied voice and not Muriel's that will threaten Vincent's ruse. Just as the female characters in *Cell Phone* discover the truth of their husband's infidelity by intercepting or making a series of coincidental calls, Muriel's moment of truth also entails a coincidental phone call with Jeffrey. Indeed, by getting Jeffrey on the phone, Muriel is able to maintain a direct line to her husband's past and the truth of his unemployment, as Jeffrey spills the beans on Vincent's real work situation. Thus, as in *Cell Phone*, the extent to which managing telephone technologies allows one to remain in an insular world is also seriously questioned in *Time Out*. As Schantz (2003) has shown, when characters deal in the noisy channels of telephone technologies the ideal phone is seriously jeopardized, making way for another kind of communications system that openly deals in the contingency.

Movement 3: A Crisis in Masculinity (the fall into the ground of criminality)

When Vincent is fired from his job, he experiences a devastating fall from the social order – a fall that leads him into the precarious world of fabricating lies. However, while the act of fabulation begins for Vincent as a way to buy some much needed time away from the pressure of work, Vincent's double life quickly takes him into the world of criminality. Interestingly, this life of crime does not provide Vincent with any relief from the pressures of work, but accentuates Vincent's responsibilities. In the next few sections I will explore the two types of crime with which Vincent

becomes involved, showing how each mode offers different kind of relationship to the home.

Karl Marx once wrote, “Capital is dead labor, which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks” (1923:257). While Marx’s description of capital refers to the way labor becomes burdensome in industrial society, the vampire qualities of capital also provide an apt metaphor for Vincent’s fall into the swirling, uncontrollable risk society. Like many white collar crimes, which use false promises and fantastic investment schemes to encroach on the resources of others, Vincent’s simulated job involves using his trust to steal from those willing to believe in his investment opportunities. Yet, unlike the grandiose schemes of a Bernie Madoff, Vincent’s ability to feed off the wealth of others is narrowly directed at the family sphere, as he uses his immediate family, former colleagues and friends to secure the money needed to remain fully in charge of his home.

In the film, these vampire-like attacks are evidenced in two ways and center around the establishment and decline of a white collar patriarchal order. First, in order to sustain his new life in Switzerland, Vincent borrows a large sum of money from his father, which he claims is for the purchase of a new condo. As if this exchange of money from father to son were able to heal the film’s crisis in masculinity, the father consents to Vincent’s excessive request. The second act of poaching involves Vincent’s manipulation of his upper middle-class friends and colleagues. As mentioned elsewhere, Vincent’s criminal life really begins when he lures his friends and colleagues into investing in his make believe UN development projects. Like Vincent’s manipulation of his father, the betrayal of his friends is made possible due to his belonging to an intimate network of white collar friends. After all, when he takes

large sums of money from his friends none of his “investors” ever ask for any documentation or proof of their investments.

Indeed, with the exception of one gentleman, who is not a direct acquaintance of Vincent, all of Vincent’s victims act on trust, believing that since Vincent is like them, one of the good old boys, their money is safe. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. Using his friend’s money to fuel his double life, Vincent’s betrayal of his friends’ trust again showcases Vincent’s rejection and rebellion against the pressures of being the patriarchal head of the family. In short, by recklessly abusing his fellow brotherly clan of white collar of workers, by sucking them into his web of deceit, Vincent wreaks havoc on the patriarchal establishment.

While Vincent is able to use his charm and trust to fuel his double life, when he meets the seedy businessman Jean-Michel, Vincent’s simulated life takes a dramatic turn. In short, Vincent’s bravado performance does not seem to work on Jean-Michel. As if he were able to see right through Vincent’s simulated life, Jean-Michel immediately confronts Vincent, demanding to know what really lurks behind his strange investment opportunity. According to Judith Franco, Vincent’s inability to convince Jean-Michel of his double life has everything to do with his different social background. Unlike Vincent and his middle class management friends, Jean-Michel belongs to a different order of masculinity, one where crime and toughness is a natural fact of his life. As Franco writes,

If male alienation ... is figured in terms of the protagonist’s inexpressivity, *L’Emploi du temps* draws attention to the alienating effect of language. Vincent delivers a virtuoso verbal performance and ultimately gets caught up in his own rhetoric in an attempt to construct a flattering representation of himself, tailored to the demands of his bourgeois milieu. While visiting a Swiss bank, he picks up brochures and spends his days studying the information to create a fictitious persona. Significantly, only outsider Jean-Michel, who does not belong to

Vincent's bourgeois circle, sees through the verbal mimicry ("You didn't seem to believe what you were saying") (2008:40).

Unlike the rest of Vincent's friends who are incapable of detecting his fictitious personae and cannot put an end to his orbit into fantasy, Jean-Michel immediately detects Vincent's lies and brings him back to the ground of reality. In part this capability has everything to do with the idea that you can't con a con-artist. As the head of a bootlegging crime ring, that deals in ripped off merchandise, Jean-Michel is an expert in deception, and can detect when he knows something is not the real thing. But, while their criminal paths bring together both men (eventually Vincent joins Jean Michel's counterfeit business) what really draws them together has more to do with Jean-Michel's own difficult experiences with living up to the pressures of being a family man. Having previously maintained a high profile career, Jean-Michel's family life took a sudden turn for the worse when he was convicted of his own white collar crime. Spending years in jail, his relationship with family became frayed and, like Vincent, has been living a precarious life outside the family home. Indeed, both men's disrupted family lives seems to predispose them to seek out untraditional homes: while Vincent lives mostly in his car, Jean Michel chooses to live and work out of his hotel, using some of the rooms to store his bootlegged merchandise.

There are two significant narrative developments that emerge out of the appearance of Jean-Michel. First, by detecting Vincent's disillusionment and even offering to listen to Vincent's confession, Jean-Michel is the only character who is able to bring him back into the space of work and reality. He offers Vincent a place to live and a job, which Vincent hopes will help repay all his innocent victims. In short, the appearance of Jean-Michel represents the stage of reconciliation. Yet, at the same time, by accepting an illegal job, Vincent's work continues to place his family at risk.

This is evident in the scene in which Jean-Michel tricks Vincent into having him over for a family dinner. Pretending to be a work colleague, whose job with the United Nations involves fighting international crime, Jean-Michel's presence quite literally has a sickening effect on Muriel. When the conversation turns to Jean-Michel's expert knowledge of Italy's criminal networks, for instance, Muriel becomes suddenly ill and retreats to her bedroom. Since Muriel has already figured out that Vincent was let go of his job, the creepy presence of Jean-Michel escalates her fear as she has no idea who her husband is and what kind of work he has gotten into.

In the final scenes of the film, Vincent's status as an outsider in his own home reaches the eerie point at which he is transformed into an enemy and unrecognizable stranger. Deciding to finally give up his new criminal life of selling bootleg products, Vincent returns home and desperately tries to reconnect with his family. However, his reception is neither hospitable nor familial. His older son, who throughout the film becomes increasingly alienated, barricades himself in his bedroom refusing to "talk to the bastard." And as Vincent attempts to retain control over his family, the scene becomes remarkably unstable, as the family looks upon him as an uninvited intruder. Oddly, despite being completely disregarded by his family, Vincent keeps his game of lies going, declaring that he is tired from his long commutes and will take a week off work. Receiving no response from his bewildered family, Vincent then diagnoses his own condition through reference to his family: "What are you all looking at. You guys are sick." Then, like a criminal whose midnight intrusion has been detected, Vincent jumps out the window, running away as his father proceeds up the driveway. Unable to live up to the masculine pressures of being the head of the house, Vincent's flight from his home provides a perfect image of his flight into the uncanny: while the

fake job is supposed to lend him some time and social status, in the end Vincent's crisis in masculinity pushes him further and further away from the security of the home.

Conclusion: (The return to work as the precondition for a free-fall)

When Vincent is fired from his job he experiences a devastating fall from the social world, an orbit into the fantastic that leaves him detached from the family home. By the end of the film, though, Vincent's uncanny journey comes full circle. As mentioned earlier, the film's climatic conclusion involves an extremely distressed Vincent, who escapes the family home and, after abandoning his car, veers out into the darkness. Suicide seems inevitable. However, instead of remaining faithful to the true life story on which the film is based (in the real story Jean-Claude Romand kills his family and attempts suicide) Cantet avoids the closure of a sensationalistic ending by having Vincent return to the work force, presumably cured of his delusional double life. But despite Vincent's supposed return to normalcy, Cantet's ending does not provide any resolution to the alienating effects of modern work. Indeed, though Vincent is shown at the film's conclusion interviewing for another high profile job, his return to work merely places him in the exact situation which led to his initial plummet. As Judith Franco writes, "The closing scene dramatizes Vincent's tragic destiny as he succumbs to social pressure (once again represented by the father who set up the job interview) and is condemned to live a lie, to be something that he is not: an ambitious businessman. Vincent's last words, "I'm not scared," are contradicted by his petrified facial expression. As the camera closes in on him and the melancholic background music drowns out his final words, the male rebel is literally crushed and obliterated" (2008:40) This, it seems, is Cantet's tragic resolution to Vincent's crisis in

the loss of time. Trying to salvage some form of identity not colonized by modern capitalism, Vincent's devastating, shameful, and self-delusional encounter with the uncanny amounts to nothing more than a painful return to the scene of the crime.

Conclusion

A Look Back: An Uncanny Return?

In this dissertation I have provided a broad assessment of the cinematic (un)homely. Heavily influenced by Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny," the (un)homely is a concept that speaks to the way familiar spaces and everyday environments can quickly become foreign, uncertain and inhospitable. The (un)homely represent the difficulty of finding and going home. In Freud's definition the (un)homely is marked by a kind of psychological imbalance, a haunting that occurs when something that should have remained secret comes back to life. The uncanny represents the return of the repressed, the return of everything that is superstitious, inexplicable and mysterious.

While cultural studies has and continues to utilize the Freudian uncanny as a poignant trope, which enables a range of cultural objects to be read in terms of the subject's precarious libidinal economy (the uncanny as interior threat), there are other ways that we can use the (un)homely to describe and analyze the often inhospitable spaces of contemporary global societies. Indeed through a broad reading of several recent theorists, I have shown that the uncertain relationship between the (un)homely and the homely conjures up a wide range of connotations that take us beyond the internal disruptions caused by the subject's dis-unified identity. From the conflicting spaces of city life and the unease and discordance involved with forced migrations, to the injustice of gendered domestic homes and the burdens of mobile work, the (un)homely is, as Freud initially contended, a diverse, and perhaps untamable,

phenomena that shows the difficulty of dwelling in the contemporary world. In the remaining part of this conclusion I wish to draw on several of the major themes evidenced in my analysis. These themes include: the problem of hybridity, the scale of the home, mobility and flight and the right to make a home.

Hybridity

As both Nicholas Royle and Homi Bhabha argue, at the heart of the experience of the (un)homely is a problem in demarcating boundaries. The uncanny, as Royle writes, represents a problem in delineating the proper boundaries between what is inside and outside, between what is public and private. For Bhabha the (un)homely is a hybrid experience, as it brings together different social and cultural worlds in a “third space,” a new experience of space and identity that cannot be traced back to the an original or pure culture. Thus while it may seem like the (un)homely simply represents the idea that one is always open to an external or internal attack, in truth the (un)homely questions our ability to know on which side of the line we find ourselves: is the home inside or outside? Is one’s domestic memories private or public? Is one’s identity housed in the body or technology?

As we have seen, in all of the films I analyze the decline of the home or family can be read in terms of a widespread difficulty in maintaining boundaries. In chapter two, this problem in spatial demarcation was acutely depicted through various permeable surfaces – windows, glass panes, lenses – that questioned whether the dweller was firmly secured within the domestic interior. Indeed, whereas the apartment building in *The Decalogue* belonged to the legacy of communist mass housing, and should have formed a paternal container – a kind of Socialist father-figure - in the series no character seemed capable of creating a formidable defense

against a world strife with political uncertainty. Yet the inability to seal off boundaries was not always seen as a sign of failure – crossing the boundaries between inside and outside could at times point to a more hopeful future, a new space where alternate modes of dwelling could be forged and addressed.

In other chapters the slippage between inside and outside borders was also evidenced, as the hybridity of boundaries could represent anything from the merger of new urban collectivities to the inability to escape the turmoil of modern work. In chapter 3, the private spaces of Fletcher's building were quickly transformed into a site for a collective experiment in local amateur media production, as an inner city community came together to fight off the might of global gentrification. Here, the question of origins – was Fats Waller really a native son of Passiac? - was not reduced to questions of authenticity; rather locating one's roots became a way to create a sense of community by making the past conform to the future. In chapters 5 and 6, maintaining the boundaries between inside and outside centered on controlling one's mobile technologies, as the home's dispersal across a range of spaces created a precarious home environment in which concealing and disclosing certain kinds of information proved tenuous at best. Here, the whole dilemma of ensuring one's spatial whereabouts hinged on the difficulty of controlling one's mobile life.

The Scale of the Home

It is common to think of the home as a specific kind of place: a home has four walls and a roof, comes with a mortgage and, if you're lucky, a back yard. But as many of the theorists discussed in this dissertation indicate, the home is far more than a house, much more than a physical abode. On the contrary, the home is multi-scalar. The home, whatever it may mean, is a site that is constantly in contact with other sites.

The home may be a tiny room in an apartment, an entire house, a neighborhood or the entire nation. The home may be a place where one may dream and think: a space in the past that exists only in memory. The home may be local, as in the idea that I take up residence in a specific place. Or the home may be many sites - both real and imaginary - that intersect a range of local, regional, national and international spaces.

In my analysis we have encountered many of the home's scales. In chapter 2, the home was seen as an important tool in articulating the might of communist ideology, as the apartment complex became the concrete manifestation of the nation's experiment in urban housing and design. Yet, while one side of the apartment complex pointed toward the socialist past, in the series the building also served as a global sign, a site of fragmentation that showed the precarious state of the nation within a world of globalization. As in chapter 2, Chapter 3 also used an apartment building to show how the home belongs to broader scales. However, whereas *The Decalogue* looked at the question of national sovereignty in a world where national borders were crumbling, in *Be Kind Rewind*, a particular home was used to address the way many nations have begun using similar urban redevelopment projects to "gentrifying" older cores of cities and the social impact such initiatives have on urban groups. In short, the home became a battleground where local groups attempted to ward off the might of a ubiquitous global process.

While certain homes in the dissertation were analyzed in terms of the way they articulated large-scale problems, other parts of my analysis focused on specific domestic objects – cellphones, tables, hutches – that explored the way certain characters inhabited their environments. In chapter 4, for example, the figures of a hutch and dinner table were analyzed in terms of Baudrillard's notion of the

‘traditional home.’ While viewed in terms of the traditional home, these objects acted as signs of authority, plenitude and the family’s ability to maintain social relations, for Egan and Bingham the home is a bankrupt institution that plays little role in their precarious, mobile lives. Here, the interiors of both Egan and Bingham’s apartments provided evidence of the way the family sphere may be a very lonely and dejected space that is hardly the parental guarantor of moral authority, as Baudrillard writes.

As in chapter 4, where specific objects acted as signs of the inability to make home, in chapters 5 and 6, the central device used to articulate problems in dwelling was the cellphone. As a device that enables users to traverse many sites, to remain socially connected or disconnected while on the move, the mobile phone was seen as tool that enabled the home to be dispersed across many scales. In *Cell Phone* this dispersal was positioned within the city, as the husband attempted to maintain control over his mobile networks by preventing what kinds of information entered the home. In *Time Out* the reach of the mobile phone was extended much further as Vincent attempted to maintain his position as paternal father figure, while traversing between France and Switzerland. Thus, while at times my corpus of films brought attention to the way the home can be thought of as a national or global entity, other times, the scale of the home was quite small, as an isolated place or object came to situate the dilemma of domestic uncertainty.

Motility

If finding home represents the ability to be firmly and safely grounded in a place, does the (un)homely automatically conjure up a world of migration, exile and flight? Is the (un)homely the quintessential experience of up-rootedness? On one hand, the (un)homely experience I have outlined certainly does entail the problem of encountering a world beset by

constant motion. In chapters 2 and 3, for example, the home was analyzed in terms of the way various kinds of global movements impacted the stability of the home. In *The Decalogue* the world of global circulation and instant real time transmission was succinctly depicted through the restlessness of the silent observer and his radical ability to break the diegetic barrier. Yet while the silent observer captured the way the boundaries of place are transformed in an age of invisible information transmission, the show's depiction of transnational movement also entailed various domestic object and signs – consumer products, advertisements, air travel, and passports - that called attention to some global elsewhere.

While chapters 2 and 3 explored movement in terms of a global elsewhere (global circulation, global gentrification,) other chapters explored the way local environments entail various modes of motility. In chapters 5 and 6, motility involved the way new mobile technologies enabled subjects to be in various “social and communicative” places simultaneously and the difficulties that arise when one's spatial context becomes decontextualized by information networks. In chapter 4 the issue of motility was explored through the issue of the 24 work day and the way for certain people space is always geographically promiscuous, as the mobile worker is forced to deal with a work world that depends on being elsewhere.

Yet, while all the films I analyze look at how the home is impacted by different modes of motility (automotive, transnational, informational) I do not think that the (un)homely should be read in opposition to stasis or “geographic monogamy.” After all, as much feminist literature can attest, for many women being contained to a “stable and static” home may be far from comforting or liberating; here taking flight, or becoming exiled from the home, may be the very antidote to years of domestic subjection. Indeed, as we saw in *The Decalogue*, for all the characters, the decline of the family can be partially explained in terms of their inability to take flight, to flee their oppressive surroundings. Thus, unlike the silent observer, who may seamlessly and smoothly move through the social world, the other characters are contained

and trapped by their home life. Thus when thinking about the poles of migration and stasis it is important to note that neither can guarantee the good home; rather at times being exiled may be the precursor for an active engagement in the world.

The Right to the Home

In many ways what all these preceding comments on the (un)homely and the homely amount to is the question of who has the right to a home. As we saw with Iris Marion Young, while we need to be suspicious about how the home is quite often a site of repression and injustice, and is never the unquestionable basis of the ‘good life,’ we nonetheless need to articulate ways in which to dwell in the world together; we need to find ways in which our modes of building provide subjects with a certain degree of individual rights, freedom, and safety. In short, we need to articulate a framework that gives people the right to a home. Of course, this does not mean that the homely needs to be articulated in term of eradicating the (un)homely, since at times the disruptive powers of uncertainty and unfamiliarity is precisely what is needed to upset the status quo.

The optimism and hope surrounding the powers of the (un)homely I think is most poignantly expressed in *Be Kind Rewind*. As we saw, through a series of disruptions to the home, Mike and Jerry were actually able to ward off social anomie by using Fletcher’s building to create a “third space,” a new and untested place in the present where a new community could be forged and sustained. Yet there are other instances of hope that emerged around the disruptive force of the (un)homely. When Shen and Wu uncover their husband’s web of lies, after all, they are placed in the painful situation of dealing with a breakdown in the family; yet this breakdown is liberating: by infiltrating their husband’s network of lies both women are able to

create momentary utopias, where the power of female networks can overpower the masculinity of mobile technologies.

Thus, while for Freud the uncanny emerges a threatening experience that questions the subject's self-determination, a cipher for the failure of the project of modernity, we need to attend to the ways in which the (un)homely can actually be quite liberating and freeing. Exile, migration, dispersal, fragmentation, these may all be the symptomatic signs of our so-called postmodern societies, but homes can be forged on the move, homes can be made despite the world's inhospitality.

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