5 Taiwan's Cold War Geopolitics in Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers*

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"I find myself in an awkward position," Aijaz Ahmad confesses in his 1987 essay, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness." He goes on to confess in a personal tone that he is troubled by the sense of betrayal he felt in reading his intellectual hero and comrade offer an anti-theoretical account of "Third World" literature and culture. Ahmad goes to great trouble to show that in his essay, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," that Jameson uses "Third World" and "otherness" in a polemically instrumental manner.¹ Ahmad basically argues that "Third World literature" as Jameson describes it, does not exist. Ahmad's critique of Jameson's mystification of Third World literature (and by proxy cultural production) is at its most trenchant when he points out that Marxist theory should allow us to see the ways in which the world is unified by "a single mode of production, namely the capitalist one" and that Jameson's rejection of liberal 'universalism' in favor of the nationalist/postmodernist divide was specious at best.² Ahmad insists on the particularity and diversity of South Asian literary culture in the face of Jameson's naïve and sweeping claims about the culture produced by countries that have experienced imperialism, but I have never seen in English a thorough criticism of the way in which Fredric Jameson treated the work of the late Taiwanese filmmaker Edward Yang. So I find myself, almost thirty years on, in a similarly awkward position. Film and cultural critics on the Left have been remarkably deferential to Fredric Jameson: he is seen as fighting on the 'correct' side of the culture wars, against the canon-defending likes of William Bennett and E.D. Hirsch. Those wars have been put to bed now and Andrew Hartman has shown that Jameson's side has largely won the struggle over what is or what is not worthy of serious scholarly study. It is time, therefore, to take a closer look at Jameson's reading of Yang's film.³

During the 1980s, an incredibly prolific period of the director's career, Edward Yang made films that dissected the daily lives and aspirations of Taiwan's new bourgeoisie, with a special focus on women in the city. In *Qingmeizhuma* (*Taipei Story*, 1985) and *Hai tan de yi tian* (*That Day, on the Beach*, 1983), female characters all play central roles in the stories that Yang wants to tell. In *Kongbufenzi* (*The Terrorizers*, 1986),

the female protagonists are restless and discontented: Zhou Yufang, the photographer's girlfriend, and the White Chick all seem unscathed by the subtle violence and oppression they find around them. Yang's 1980s films are about women suffering, growing up, learning something about themselves and eventually, getting what they want. Outside of *Yi Yi* (2000), however, none of his films have received theatrical distribution in the United States. Only in 2015 did the Criterion collection issue a remastered version of Yang's critically acclaimed epic, *Gu ling jie shao nian sha ren shi jian* (*A Brighter Summer Day*, 1991).

Jameson must have been at a rare festival screening of *The Terrorizers*, allowing him to write about a film that he assumed most of his readers would not have actually seen.⁴ In cinema studies, James Tweedie has argued for an understanding of art cinema that exists within a continuum of aesthetic and political preoccupations that, while transnational in character, are tied to national film boards, art cinema markets, festivals and prestige/status circuits of distribution.⁵ I should be content that Edward Yang's films have survived Jameson's polemics, but I find myself in Ahmad's awkward position. I appreciate what Jameson has done for film theory on the one hand, but I cannot ignore Jameson's misreadings and his misguided claims for Yang's film. I have to work through the ways in which Jameson's interpretation of Yang's work was symptomatic of a kind of cultural theory that traded in materialist, class-based analysis for the allegedly more sophisticated concepts of postmodernism.

During the late 1980s, Fredric Jameson was deep in a romance with all things Chinese. I had first-hand evidence of his encounters with the East because in the fall of 1985, Fredric Jameson and I were both teaching at Peking University. I was fresh out of college and he was a visiting professor, but like all foreigners on campus, we were housed in Shao Yuan, a complex of buildings with its own dining halls guarded by fierce *fu-wuyuan* (attendants) who checked the credentials of any Chinese-looking person who entered the foreign dormitory area. Despite the fact that I had grown up in the United States, I was born in Taiwan and hence traveled with a Taiwanese passport—issued by a country hardly anybody still recognized as a nation. I technically qualified as a “foreigner” under the status of *aiguo huaqiao* or “Patriotic Overseas Chinese.” Our dormitories were populated by African and Soviet exchange students and three low-level English lecturers who were all Ivy grads.

When I met Jameson, he appeared a large, balding, white guy, a famous professor of Marxism with a genial air who lived in a thickly carpeted one-bedroom suite. He was giving lectures on postmodernism translated into Chinese to an audience of hundreds of eager Chinese students; I was teaching college English to eager undergraduates, hungry for exposure to the rest of the world. It was an exciting time to be in China: Jameson was doing his cognitive mapping and building the postmodernism brand and I was struggling to understand my place in the world. Fred drank a

lot of whiskey that you could only buy with foreign exchange notes: he was always trying to trade his *renminbi*, the then non-exchangeable currency in which we were paid, for U.S. dollars or other foreign currency. My youthful Puritanism found this peccadillo unbecoming. I saw him as an ecstatic Kurtz-like character, taking private Chinese lessons from a group of eager gift-bearing tutors. When he went out, he was accompanied by an entourage of young male admirers. He was searching for Third World, Communist authenticity on the one hand, but welcomed by intellectually starved Chinese students as a voice from the West on the other. In the waning days of the Cold War, exchanges between Western Marxists and Chinese students were extraordinary events.⁶ After he returned to the U.S. from Beijing in 1986, Jameson published "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" in *Social Text*.⁷ When I read that article, I think about Jameson in the smoke-filled rooms of Peking University, sipping whiskey, talking with "Third World" intellectuals and trying to accept nationalism as a powerful emancipatory sentiment before arriving at the fact that national allegory would be the key with which to unlock the secrets of the alleged "Third World" narratives.

In his introduction to *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, published as a quick follow up to the hugely successful *Postmodernism or the Logic of Late Capital* of 1992, Jameson uses the term, "the geopolitical unconscious," a concept that is necessary if we are to "refashion national allegory into a conceptual instrument for grasping "our new being-in-the-world." Jameson makes the claim that "thinking today" is "an attempt to think through the world system as such."⁸ *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* came to define a field of literary and cultural studies described by the "spatial turn." Scanning the entirety of the "world system" itself, Fredric Jameson, theorist, offered us nothing less than his cognitive map of the entire globe through his reading of cinema and "space."

In the *Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Jameson devotes an entire chapter called "Remapping Taipei" to Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers* as the postmodern film par excellence. In Jameson's theory of Yang's cinema, Jameson describes Taipei as a city that is underdeveloped and postmodern at the same time. He coins an acronym, SMS, or "Synchronous Monadic Simultaneity" to describe Yang's complex storytelling technique, in which sound bridges are used over montages that create visual links between disparate story lines and confusing diegetic spaces and the characters that inhabit them. For the first three minutes of Yang's film, we are introduced to disparate spheres of significant action, which have no apparent relationship to each other. Yang cuts from a cramped, comfortable bed in which a young woman is reading to a beautiful woman lying in a wood-paneled bedroom, a classic tough-guy cop, and a corpse in the street. For Jameson, modernist

narrative technique has been reworked by a “Third World” filmmaker, Edward Yang, to postmodern ends.⁹

In fact, what Yang does as a director is not particularly Third World or postmodern. Yang cuts between vastly different spaces and scenes: he lingers over details; his takes are long. We see newspaper clippings, a high angle shot of an alley, a close-up of a woman sleeping, an aerial view of a police car driving down a wide boulevard at dawn. Yang’s complex, casually constructed opening sequence appears to Jameson to be the highest embodiment of ‘postmodernism.’ The scenes all take place at the same time, 7:00 am in the morning, but the editing unites vastly different and fragmented spaces.

After Jameson draws a series of complex links between André Gide’s *Les faux monnayeurs* and Yang’s film, Jameson delivers a devastating reading of Li Lizhong. He hates this character and finds him pathetic; Jameson writes, “it may be at least permitted to see his fate as a figural acting out of fantasies about the limits to Taiwanese development in a world system.”¹⁰ Jameson aligns Taiwan and this average, unattractive male protagonist and mediocre doctor with the pathos of aspirational “underdevelopment.” Li is certainly a tragic character whose suicide is the climactic event that resolves the disparate plot points. But according to Jameson, the cuckolded husband and white-collar backstabber is the embodiment of the sadness and melancholy of Taiwan’s aspirational, developmental “post-Third Worldness.” Yang’s films are carefully observed stories about middle-class people in Taiwan who in one way or another are all dealing with the intense speed of the country’s economic development. Almost all of Yang’s male characters are out of step with both their worlds; surging forward as entrepreneurs, or clinging to obsolete forms of Confucianism, Yang’s male characters are often disappointing, passive, voyeuristic, romantic, and childish. With them, Yang explores the psychological toll that modernization takes on a class of relatively privileged men. Li Lizhong is a particularly extreme case of male weakness: in *That Day*, on the Beach, Chen Dewei is a slightly more likeable version of Li, but he is just as deceptive and emotionally ill-equipped to deal with the complexities of modern life. That Jameson focuses on the repellent character of incompetent, depressive husband and then compares his disarray to Taiwan’s ‘post-Third-Worldness’ is disturbing indeed. In *Yi Yi*, the father N.J. represents yet another version of a Taiwanese man unable to find his way in the modern world: N.J.’s love of his children redeems him. In the mid-1980s, Jameson’s closest Chinese collaborators were graduate students from the People’s Republic of China. I cannot help but speculate that they found Li Lizhong troubling and encouraged Jameson’s superficial reading of this unlikeable and unheroic figure.

Yang was deeply aware of these effects of rapid economic changes that Taiwan was undergoing: the country passed through one of the

most intensive periods of industrialization the world has ever seen. In the 1970s and accelerating well into the 1980s, Taiwan was becoming a tropical *Ruhrgebiet*, seeing double-digit economic growth and rapid urbanization and industrialization. Li, like many of Yang's male characters, is unable to keep up with the times. Few could take into account what was happening economically, politically, and culturally on the island, but Taiwan's new generation of filmmakers tried to capture the contradictions and ambiguities of a country swept into global capital. Between 1985 and 1988, Taiwan's GDP almost doubled: in terms of the world system, Taiwan's manufacturing sector took on flexible, cheap and fast mass manufacturing for an export-driven economy that would be exported eventually to the Pearl River Delta and the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone across the straits. As a result, Taiwan became a center of silicon chip production. Both Hou Hsiao-hsien and Yang addressed the breakneck speed of economic development in their cinematic work, and both are interested in the ways in which these processes break down traditional family structures and gender roles. That Jameson as a historical materialist allegedly talking about world systems neglects to account for the forces of industrialization and modernization to which Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien give testimony is distressing. Does this lacuna about Taiwan and Edward Yang become an embarrassing footnote in the work of an otherwise great Marxist critic, whose cultural voracity makes him and his theories a kind of surveillant agent of the world system as a totality? Or are his blind spots actually symptomatic of a deeper flaw in his work?¹¹ Under the aegis of an allegedly postmodern reading of class, Jameson neglects Yang's engagement with the particularity of the city in which it was filmed. Jameson's erasure of the particularity of Taipei as a city plays to the ignorance of non-Taiwanese, non-film festival-going readers. Edward Yang's film, released in Taiwan at the end of 1986, was screened at festivals in 1987 and dropped out of circulation for almost two decades. Readers of "Remapping Taipei" had to take Jameson's reading at its word. Jameson's analysis of Edward Yang's *The Terrorizers* is a fascinating example of academic Marxism at the height of the theory/culture wars of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In his interview with *New Left Review*, Edward Yang talks about the intense emotions of a period when the authoritarianism of Taiwan's particular culture and politics dissolved under the pressure of economic growth and political marginalization when the U.S. cut off diplomatic ties. Along with its export driven economic expansion, KMT government initiatives provided the means for ambitious young people to study abroad. Computer science and engineering were the specializations of choice. Taiwan made the transition to an industrial and urban society, with its own elites connected to the rest of the world through education and trade. The growing strength of the Taiwanese middle class led to

the collapse of the KMT military dictatorship in 1987, following a pattern of Southern economic liberalization leading to popular militancy described by Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver in their 2001 essay “Workers, North and South.”¹²

In fact, Li embodies the tragedy of a white-collar professional left behind by the successes of entrepreneurial and creative class elites like Zhou Yufang, his wife and her lover. In some sense, Jameson was correct in identifying Taiwan as a transitional space. During the latter half of the Cold War, Taiwan became a no man’s land, not a Third nor a First World country: its ghostly, extralegal existence, combined with rapid economic growth, gave the island an unsteady and fantasmatic quality, an extreme version of speeded up development that put every relationship to the past and the future in flux. In John Anderson’s analysis, “There is a self-destructiveness afoot in *Kongbufenzi* [*Terrorizers*] that seems a pathological symptom of social unrest.”¹³

To the KMT, Taiwan was always a non-place, a tropical way station, a temporary garrison where the Nationalist Army would re-gather its strength (with American help) to return to and reconquer the Mainland. Chiang Kai-shek had shipped out of the Mainland crates of gold ingots and national treasures ranging from Shang era bronzes and jades to Ming dynasty vases from the Forbidden City. As the weary years of exile wore on, he started to build a dream city on top of Taipei. A national museum of art called Gugong (or Forbidden City) was built in the hills overlooking the Taipei basin to house the ancient artifacts that spanned Han Chinese dynastic history. Chiang Kai-shek ordered the building of Taipei’s only five star Grand Hotel in the Chinese “palace style” where he received visiting dignitaries and heads of state. Japanese wooden homes with tatami floors were razed to build concrete apartment blocks. In 1947, after taking Taiwan back from the Japanese, the KMT rounded up local dissidents and educated Taiwanese and either murdered them in jail or killed them in the streets. Thousands died during the 2–28 incident that replicated anti-Communist massacres launched in Shanghai during the 1920s and 30s. The anti-Communist White Terror left a permanent scar on the city. By killing off local Taiwanese intelligentsia suspected of Communist sympathies, the KMT was preparing the ground for its eventual retreat to the island.

In 1949, backed by American military power and money, the KMT tried to erase Taipei’s history as a Japanese imperial outpost while building a modern “Mainland” Chinese capital on top of it. The KMT held a deep contempt for the city and the Taiwanese. Under KMT rule, Taiwan’s economy expanded and Taiwan’s island culture and cuisine adapted and changed with its Putonghua speaking occupiers. But for people like my grandparents, exiles living in shantytowns on the outskirts of the city, Taipei would remain forever inferior to the properly Chinese cities they had left behind forever. Xian, Beijing, Qingdao, Chengdu, Shanghai,

Nanjing, Heilongjiang: each veteran family tried to preserve with its fading memory an exact replica of a hometown many of them would never see again. Yet despite the title of the chapter on *The Terrorizers*, Jameson has no interest in remapping Taipei at all. Instead, he erases a city that in the late 1980s had become all but invisible to the world.

In 1979, the U.S. recognized the People's Republic of China as the sole representative of "China" or the victorious party in World War II and closed its embassy and consulate in Taipei. Taipei as a political and economic entity along with the island of Taiwan itself was cast into limbo. Chiang Kai-shek accepted Japan's capitulation alongside the Allies, but year after year, the Kuomintang and its army grew more desperate about its fantasies of retaking the Mainland from the Communists at the head of an Army supplied by the United States. Chiang Kai-shek ruled Taiwan as a Generalissimo; he and his government clung for as long as it could to the illusion that it represented China as the Republic of China.

The KMT hated that its imaginary sovereignty over the Mainland was no longer recognized, but popular protests against the KMT forced the government to give up martial law. This did not mitigate the fact that in Taipei, embassy after embassy had been shuttering its doors as European nations, erstwhile NATO aligned allies, recognized Beijing as the true representative of China, the country that was victorious against the Axis powers after World War II. When Chiang Kai-shek's son and heir, Chiang Ching-kuo finally declared the end of Kuomintang military dictatorship in 1987, releasing political prisoners and lifting censorship laws, a group of young filmmakers set out to lay claim to a city by recovering Taipei from Kuomintang delusions and censorship. Hou Hsiao-hsien's 1989 *Beiqing chengshi* (*City of Sadness*) tells the story of the traumatic events around the 2–28 massacre. Forty years of military dictatorship had not destroyed the memory of these events: the city was traumatized by the murders and the subsequent government cover up that lasted until Taiwan emerged from the iron fist of KMT military rule at the end of the 1980s.

In *The Terrorizers*, Yang focuses on the alleyways of Taipei as a space of anonymity, violence, desire. Alleys were the infrastructural under-belly of a growing city: the roads and boulevards were laid out by the Japanese and the KMT. Alleyways in Taipei are interstitial spaces where the precarious infrastructure of the modern city is laid out: the alley-ways in Yang's film are filled with debris, straw baskets, and crisscrossed by utility wires and dripping pipes and gutters (Figure 5.1).

Dripping water, the uncontrollable by-product of hastily installed plumbing and gutters overwhelmed by tropical monsoons and torrential rains, is constantly heard in the alleyway scenes. In the film, there are a few "eyes on the alley," but they are the eyes of police and voyeurs and

Figure 5.1 The photographer entering an alley in *The Terrorizers* (Central Motion Pictures, 1986).

not kind neighbors. While Jameson breaks down the spaces of the film as “traditional” (the bath), “national” (the hospital), “multinational” (the publishing house), and “transnational” (the hotel corridor), he neglects the alley altogether as a figure of the local. Despite Jameson’s brilliant analysis of the reflexivity and contingency in the plot of Yang’s film, his taxonomy of Yang’s cinematic spaces often feels forced and overcomplicated. Markus Nornes’ review of *The Terrorizers* for *Film Quarterly* describes the film’s formal particularities in a less conceptually belabored manner: “In a radical break from mainstream Taiwanese film, Yang uses a cool, detached collage style whose intertwining stories initially defy cohesiveness, then intermingle and finally converge on a double ending.”¹⁴ Spectators are constantly working at deciphering diegetic meaning in medium shots of the city where significant characters move in and out of the frame with little warning; but to make the act of watching this film even more challenging, despite its often melodramatic and emotionally harrowing scenes, the “cool detachment” of the film can be attributed to its refusal of extra-diegetic sound. Other than Nat King Cole’s “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” the soundtrack never promotes easy identification with the action or characters. In this sense, its refusal of extra-diegetic sound puts it squarely in the canon of films that work through issues of surveillance and voyeurism, from Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* to Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Conversation*.

In the *New Left Review*, Edward Yang talked about the internal rage and the external conformity that characterized the psychic life of his generation: he also described the extraordinary opportunities to see European films provided by KMT cultural initiatives meant to promote Taipei as a cosmopolitan global capital of the Cold War world. Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien were supported by government grants and initiatives

as well as by the Central Motion Pictures Corporation, established by the KMT to encourage local filmmaking, but both filmmakers defied KMT cultural norms by capturing and recording local culture, history and customs in ways that were not 'nationalistic' but locally grounded.¹⁵ For instance, Yang uses the damp alleyways of Taipei as the privileged space of narrative convergence, where the fates of different members of Taiwanese society become fatally intertwined. In the oppressive atmosphere of the KMT military dictatorship, public spaces were dangerous places. The 2-28 massacres of 1947 made the streets of Taipei themselves scenes of murder and cover up. The KMT's campaigns for purity and propriety also created various senses of panic. Yang captures the ambivalence of urban life in Taipei where public spaces are associated with violence and infection (hence Li Lizhong's compulsive hand washing), but private homes, even when luxurious, were prison-like, especially for women.

White Chick (in the English subtitles) or Susan ends up a literal prisoner in her mother's apartment after she breaks her ankle escaping from a police raid on the gambling den run by her boyfriend. Nornes describes Susan as the child of a "prostitute and an American GI": whatever the case may be, White Chick's mother is filled with rage and resentment against the father of her child who abandoned her in Taipei. Her daughter's Eurasian appearance is an affront to the mother and a startling visual marker of her past involvement with a non-Chinese man. The daughter's juvenile delinquency is a repetition of the mother's pursuit of pleasure. When Susan/White Chick solicits men on street corners, she is shot from a surveillance vantage point. Yang's camera follows her from a distance as she loiters on the street. Her flat affect and preppy clothes don't communicate prostitution, but her exotic, non-Chinese looks attract the attention of men (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 An unlikely femme fatale, White Chick dresses in white and looks bored in *The Terrorizers* (Central Motion Pictures, 1986).

Later, trapped in her mother's apartment, White Chick entertains herself by making prank calls, dialing up random numbers in the telephone book and telling lies and pretending to be someone she isn't.

One day, she calls Li Lizhong's number and his wife, Zhou Yufang picks up. Zhou is a successful author with a bad case of writer's block. Pretending to be Li's mistress, White Chick tells Zhou they should meet and gives her the address of the former gambling den where the bust took place. Because her suspicions about her otherwise boring husband's fidelity are aroused, Zhou sleeps with her recently divorced former boyfriend—a successful software entrepreneur—and goes to work for him in his newly refurbished offices lined with empty, well-lit display cases. Taiwan's economic boom makes success easily attainable for its educated middle class. In the *New Left Review* interview, Yang alludes to the simple intensity of emotions that accompanied the success of Taiwanese electronics entrepreneurs of whom Zhou's lover seems to be one. The ease with which Zhou moves from marriage to a new life represents the breakneck speed with which life was changing in the Taipei of the era. After she leaves Li, Zhou gets everything she wants. She writes a potboiler novel about a husband who, upon discovering his wife's infidelity, murders her lover and kills himself. The novel is an instant success and she is nominated for a prestigious literary award.

Terrorizers has a famous double ending, the first of which has Li Lizhong stealing his cop friend's gun, and going to the apartment his wife shares with her new lover in order to kill him. In the first ending, Li rings their doorbell in the early morning, shoots his wife's lover who answers the door and heads toward their bedroom. Zhou wakes up alone in bed after hearing gunshots coming from an off-screen space, implying the murder/suicide in her novel. In the film's second ending, the cop dreams that Li has picked up White Chick. He leads a police raid on the hotel where she has taken his friend and arrests the boyfriend. Just as a shot rings out, the cop wakes up and runs to his bathroom where he finds that Li Lizhong has shot himself. The cop finds his friend's dead body in his traditional, Japanese style bathtub, with gritty and badly applied grout.

Yang cuts from a shot of Li's head leaning against the tiled edge of a bath, with the blood and viscera flowing at a right angle toward the left side of the screen. We see Zhou wake up a second time, apparently triggered by an intuition of her husband's suicide. She bends over the bed and throws up over the side of the bed toward the left side of the frame in the exact space and direction where the blood from her husband was flowing (Figures 5.3 and 5.4).

According to Jameson, "The women's dramas are thus spatial, not only because they are postmodern, (although the characterization of postmodernity in terms of the new social movements in general and feminism in particular is a widespread one), but also and above all, because they are urban, and even more because they are articulated within this particular city." 16

Figure 5.3 Li Lizhong, blood and brains coming out of the back of his head, in one of two final sequences in *The Terrorizers* (Central Motion Pictures, 1986).

Figure 5.4 Zhou Yufang, vomiting over the side of the bed, in *The Terrorizers*

Jameson tortures a pseudo-feminist reading of the final scene, but he refuses the obvious reading of the vomiting. It is quite clear that Yang meant us to understand that Zhou is pregnant. She can finally have it all once she is freed from the troublesome husband: she has finally conceived a child, finished her novel, and lives with a wealthy and successful lover. It is clear that Zhou is able to connect to the world system in a way that her husband cannot. The narrative empowerment of the female

protagonist is ironic and New Wave-ish—insofar as Zhou's ruthlessness and self-determination are echoes of Jean Seberg's media savvy Patricia in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*. With her pedal pushers, short hair and insolent strut, White Chick visually evokes Seberg's Patricia, and Zhou's choices reflect on her French New Wave predecessor as well. Zhou and her lover are the success stories of Taipei. In *Taipei Story* (1985), Yang represented another couple struggling with Taiwan's economic growth, with Chin, the wife, eventually leaving her husband who is unable to give up on a Confucian way of being. While Li Lizhong is punished for his incompetence, the cop whose gun he steals is simply powerless. Marked as working class, he has a tough guy gang member look about him, with his aviator sunglasses and longer hair. He is the only character in the film shown sleeping in a mosquito net, a sure sign of tropical backwardness.

The Rich Kid/photographer rents the renovated apartment that was the scene of the shootout with which the film opens. After White Chick's recovery, she picks up a john, tries to rip him off and stabs him in a hotel room. In full flight, she goes to the former gambling den and lets herself into the apartment because she still has a key. When she turns on the light, she discovers a grid collage of 4x6 photographs pieced together to present an almost wall-sized, blown-up, close-up of her face on one of the apartment's walls. Rich Kid/photographer has made the apartment an installation to his obsession with her. The photographs he snapped while watching her flee are pasted on the walls. White Chick is not particularly perturbed by the visual evidence of his erotic and photographic obsession. She spends the night with him and steals his expensive German cameras, ready to pawn them at the local pawnshop where she learns that her boyfriend has been released from jail. Just as nonchalantly, she returns the cameras to her erstwhile admirer.

Yang's cinematic technique taxes the spectator's capacity for decoding narrative enigmas: the shot of one of Taipei's pedestrian bridges moves back and forth from stranger to stranger, unsettling our viewing relationship to the unstaged randomness of the urban scene. For Jane Jacobs, this kind of informal voyeurism made city streets and spaces safer, rather than less safe—but Taipei of the 1980s is not Greenwich Village of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Establishing shots of the city are static except for the famous pedestrian bridge sequence, which is surveillant rather than romantic. The camera moves back and forth between passersby, crossing a busy pedestrian bridge: they appear nondescript and low in affect, moving quickly through the anonymous city space. Yang cuts to a shot of the Rich Kid, leaning against the railing of the bridge, with his camera swinging back and forth from a strap: this cut allows us to attribute the camera motion we were trying to understand a few seconds earlier to Rich Kid's swinging viewfinder. Rich Kid's detachment was not based on either criminal, narrative or police

surveillance. Suddenly, we feel a sense of playfulness and innocence. The Rich Kid/photographer embodies some of that youthful, irresponsible sense of freedom promised by economic security and political stability. The streets of Taipei give off a sense of menace and indifference. The underground life of petty criminals can still seem the most evocative of a different and more pleasure-oriented world. Fear of standing out, appearing different, like the White Chick, forces the average Taipei resident to wear a mask of conformity and uniformity. Underneath that conformity, Yang's cinema shows us their rage and helplessness.

In Beijing in 1985, I was an exotic with foreign connections, not exactly the White Chick, but not completely Chinese or foreign. I knew instinctively that my gender, my fluency in Chinese and my ambiguous citizenship status made me more visible and more vulnerable to the powers that were. I taught my classes and attended Fred's lectures and found his allegedly "Marxist" theories of postmodernism especially strange in a country that at that moment wanted nothing more than the staples of modernity itself. I realized that I had re-entered a world of informal Chinese surveillance culture when, a few weeks after a male friend of mine travelling through China (with whom I was not romantically involved) spent a few nights in my dormitory room in Shao Yuan in Beijing, my father in New York City heard about my visitor.

Although I thought I did not like Jameson's too obvious enjoyment of his Kurtz-like position in 1986 Beijing, I must have identified with his intellectual project in some deeper way. I ended up the following year accepting a four-year fellowship in a Ph.D. program in French at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Jameson's work had convinced me that the true path to political-economic understanding of the global situation was through a formal and theoretical reading of French novels.

For me the, rediscovery of Taipei and Taiwan took place painfully and over many years. In 1994, when I read *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* for the first time, I felt uncomfortable taking Jameson at his word on his reading of Edward Yang's film. In fact, his primary source material was black boxed, leaving most of his readers in an asymmetrical relationship to Yang's film. At least Aijaz Ahmad has access to the variety of literature produced in India to comment on its irreducibility to Third Worldness. I had to wait at least ten years until *The Terrorizers* appeared on the festival circuit to see Yang's film. It was not through theories of postmodernism and cognitive mapping that I began to begin to understand Edward Yang's stunning accomplishment in his essentially realist films about Taipei and Taiwan as distinctive places during the 1980s. Jameson's cultural Third Worldism created a prestige differential for difficult-to-see art films, but its polemics obscured the significance of Edward Yang's film while aestheticizing its basic preoccupations with class and place.

Notes

- 1 Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65–88.
- 2 Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (Autumn 1987): 3–25, 10.
- 3 Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
- 4 Despite winning the British Film Institute Award in 1987, *The Terrorizers* was never distributed outside of Taiwan.
- 5 James Tweedie, *The Age of New Waves: Art Cinema and the Staging of Globalization* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 6 For a more detailed discussion of Jameson's use of the inaccessibility of "Chinese spaces" see my discussion in "The Farm, the Fortress and the Mirror" in *The American Idyll: Academic Anti-Elitism as Cultural Critique* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 211–12.
- 7 Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Autumn, 1986): 65–88.
- 8 Fredric Jameson, "Remapping Taipei," in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space* (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1995).
- 9 Ibid., 116.
- 10 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism and the Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992).
- 11 In *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the PRC* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), Daniel Vukovich takes Jeff Wasserstrom, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Slavoj Žižek to task for their Orientalizing misreading of China. He ignores Fredric Jameson's treatment of China and things Chinese.
- 12 Giovanni Arrighi and Beverly Silver, "Workers North and South," *Socialist Register* 37 (2001): 53–75.
- 13 John Anderson, *Edward Yang* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 52.
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