

PREFACE

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Following the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist debates of the 1970s, and the New Film History of the 1980s and early 1990s, one of the key concerns in the study of film over the past fifteen years has been what one may call the geopolitical or the topographical turn. Instead of attempting to define the essence of film (according to the old medium specificity paradigms), the more important problem to solve has become how to locate the space, or rather the spaces, of cinema.¹ In order to answer that question, one needs, in the first instance, to engage with the multiple consequences of the proliferation of media platforms, of new modes of production, circulation, distribution and consumption since the end of the 20th century. While digital moving images are seemingly everywhere, from iPhones to YouTube and Netflix to in-flight entertainment, cinema in the traditional sense of a fixed space of theatrical exhibition has become an ancillary function. Film studies methodology has adapted to these changes, branching out into research investigating developments and new practices of production in an expanded field of creative industries, as well as studies into distribution and consumption in the digital age. Topics include areas such as production research, film policy at national and supranational levels, investigations into the rise and fall and rise of 3D, the ubiquity of film festivals, the prevalence of piracy and other forms of informal distribution,² the reading strategies of audiences, and the creative activities of virtual cinephile and fan communities.

Apart from untying itself from an exclusive bind to the cinema, what Francesco Casetti has referred to as the medium's "relocation,"³ film studies in the past fifteen years has attempted to unmoor itself from other spatial paradigms, especially where these map onto pre-conceived differences in aesthetics, politics and cultural value. Thus, old hierarchical categorizations and schematic divisions such as Hollywood/mainstream cinema, European/art cinema, and Third Cinema/political resistance have become increasingly problematized and challenged. Instead, the last decade has seen a championing of the cinema at the periphery,⁴ the cinema of small, and often hitherto overlooked nations and regions,⁵ and more generally a call to de-Westernize our understanding of film.⁶ But apart from such simultaneously de-centring and localizing strategies and practices, there have also been attempts to understand more interactive and more global, but less clearly bounded, processes. These have been grouped under a range of contested categories, of which "world cinema"⁷ and "transnational cinema"⁸ have arguably become the most ubiquitous. The former category, in particular, has been employed in variety of contradictory and often mutually incompatible ways: from designating a cinematic version of the old Enlightenment ideal of a universal cultural reference point (i.e. the idea of *Weltliteratur*) to meaning anything that

lies outside the traditional duality of Hollywood mainstream and European art cinema, and thus precisely not being part of the (established) canon.

In a similar way, transnational cinema has been seen by some scholars as a means to challenge the very essence of the concept of national cinema itself and by extension to critique the discourses of identity and exclusivity that give rise to national(ist) narratives. In this reading of the transnational, then, hybrid and/or cosmopolitan identities, perspectives, and cultural practices are championed for their transformative progressive potential. For other scholars these very same transformations are seen as paving the way towards cultural homogenization and in the service of capitalist and neo-imperialist globalization, which can only be resisted through bolstering national defense mechanisms. In a different reading of the term, the transnational is being employed as a more circumscribed strategy to identify types of film and filmmakers that cannot otherwise be contained by ordinary national criteria (and thereby maintaining the normativity of national formations) – for example, the cinemas of (or featuring) migrants, diasporic communities, and ethnic minorities.

As these complex debates attest, the question of where cinema is located is inherently political, as Fredric Jameson already noted in what must now be regarded as one of the pioneering studies in the field,⁹ but it is also always, as Michael J. Shapiro has insisted on, a question of aesthetics.¹⁰ All the contributors to this special issue of *Cinéma & Cie* maintain a focus on the politics of aesthetics, while also illuminating the specific contexts of new forms of production, circulation and consumption. Delphine Wehrli, Jakob Nilsson, and Giorgio Avezzi offer more general theoretical reflections on the nature of cinema's geopolitics. In bringing into dialogue the work of Jameson and György Lukács in her essay, and arguing how the former's understanding of the term "totality" can be employed to make sense of postcolonial film practices, Wehrli's essay reminds us that much of our current assumptions about the function and uses of cinema (and art more generally) can be traced back to earlier theoretical arguments. Avezzi's contribution, meanwhile, usefully elucidates how much the rhetoric and aesthetics of world cinema remains indebted to the conceptual and metaphorical insights from classic cartography, carrying with it the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. In a similar vein, Jakob Nilsson employs Jameson's famous notion of cognitive mapping to re-envision and re-contextualise the history of "third cinema". In many of the articles, specific local case studies are brought into contact with broader global concerns. Dudley Andrew's essay on the extraordinary trajectory of Korean cinema from being a film culture barely known outside its borders for most of its history to becoming, almost overnight, a central plank of a new "world cinema canon" draws attention to the ambivalent consequences of this supposed "success," where a greater visibility in the global arena might coincide with a weakened ability of a national cinema to reflect, in a political sense, on its own local context. As a both domestically and increasingly internationally successful form of non-Hollywood popular mainstream cinema, Bollywood has frequently been an anomaly in traditional cartographies of world cinema. Alexandra Schneider's essay articulates these problems by drawing on Franco Moretti's intervention in redefining a contemporary notion of the Enlightenment ideal of *Weltliteratur*, adopting a method of comparative film analysis that relies on the insights from both the social sciences and the humanities. Angela Prysthon's contribution about the renaissance of regional filmmaking movements in Brazil highlights the doubly peripheral nature of these endeavours, while demonstrating that these practices nevertheless are unthinkable without a

dialogue that connects them to broader trends in global filmmaking. Moving from strictly national parameters to the importance of regional networks, Natalie Boehler's essay offers insights on how contemporary Southeast Asian independent filmmakers navigate national, regional, and supranational opportunities, in order to promote their often anti-imperialist or otherwise politically engaged cinematic visions. Finally, Valerio Coladonato and Ilaria De Pascalis's contributions chart the transnational dimensions in European and North American cinema, respectively. Taken together, this special issue of *Cinéma & Cie* not only manifests the multiple centrifugal and centripetal forces that drive global filmmaking practices, but also illustrates the complex theoretical and methodological approaches that can be brought to bear on their understanding.

- 1 See also Vinzenz Hediger, "What Do We Know When We Know Where Something Is? World Cinema and the Question of Spatial Ordering," *Screening the Past*, no. 37, October 2013, <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2013/10/what-do-we-know-when-we-know-where-something-is-world-cinema-and-the-question-of-spatial-ordering/>, last visit 24 November 2013.
- 2 Ramon Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2012.
- 3 Francesco Casetti, "The Relocation of Cinema," *NECSUS: European Journal of Media Studies*, no. 2, Autumn 2012, <http://www.necsus-ejms.org/the-relocation-of-cinema/>, last visit 24 November 2013.
- 4 Dina Iordanova, David Martin-Jones, Belén Vidal (eds.), *Cinema at the Periphery*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 2010.
- 5 Mette Hjort, Duncan Petrie (eds.), *The Cinema of Small Nations*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2008.
- 6 Saër Maty Bâ, Will Higbee (eds.), *De-Westernizing Film Studies*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2012. See also: Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Routledge, London-New York 1994.
- 7 Stephanie Dennison, Song Hwee Lim (eds.), *Remapping World Cinemas: Identity Culture and Politics in Film*, Wallflower, London-New York 2006.
- 8 See, e.g., Elizabeth Ezra, Terry Towden (eds.), *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2005; Patricia Pisters, Wim Staat (eds.), *Shooting The Family: Transnational Media and Intercultural Values*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2005; Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, Áine O'Healy (eds.), *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008; Nataša Đurovičová, Kathleen Newman (eds.), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, Routledge, London-New York 2010.
- 9 Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1992.
- 10 Michael J. Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*, Routledge, London-New York 2009.