

Chapter 1

Video and Interpretation

Before defining what video is, it's worth taking a moment to define what it is not. For starters, video is not simply the flickering play of random images or the televised reproduction of cinematic forms. Rather, it draws its aesthetic content from a vast multinational reservoir of icons, scripts, sound tracks, sound bites and performances, each of which requires the most careful critical analysis. Secondly, video's apparent simplicity conceals enormous complexity. The iridescent surfaces, ingenious scripts and user-friendly icons of the greatest works of video pack an astonishing amount of data into the smallest and most portable of aesthetic forms – forms which require, in turn, no less agile methods of interpretation and decoding. This is probably most obvious to those of us who teach in the university classroom and discover, to our chagrin, that our youngest students can swim effortlessly through the sort of hurricane-force media surf capable of shipwrecking a platoon of Ph.D. candidates. Still, it's worth stressing that video works are a deeply plebian and democratic art-form. Designed for maximum accessibility to a multinational audience, they display many of the best features of the global aesthetic commodities they both occasionally mimic and savagely critique: flexibility, ease of use, and sheer entertainment value.

Most of all, video culture is part and parcel of a globe-straddling consumer culture teeming with multinational contradictions. However stupefying and mind-numbing specific aspects of the consumer culture might be, multinational culture as a whole

presupposes a remarkable amount of collective cultural labor, everywhere from the childhood sports scrimmage to the World Cup spectacular, and from the vast textual overproduction of email and listservs to the public-domain freeware powering the server farms, hypertext documents and telecom protocols of the Web. Where shoppers once distinguished between 19th century family trademarks or waded through 20th century corporate acronyms, consumers nowadays confront the commodity form through plastic shells brimming with multinational icons, symbols and data of all kinds. Browsing through this information has become both a necessary survival skill in the late capitalist marketplace, as well as one of its most signal (if signally double-edged) pleasures.

To bring the market into the discussion, however, immediately raises some thorny questions about what role video plays in that marketplace, and whether it is even permissible to speak of a truly global media culture, given the horrific social, political and economic disparities of the present era. According to the World Bank's Year 2000 development report, as of 1998 the average rate of TV ownership in low-income countries was 76 TV sets per 1,000 people, while the comparable figures for middle-income and high-income countries were 257 and 567, respectively, suggesting an unprecedented expansion of TV viewership around the globe. To paraphrase the famous slogan of the 1960s, for the first time in human history, the whole world really *is* watching. On the other hand, the same report reveals that most human beings on the planet can only dream of owning a telephone, let alone a computer or an ISP connection; billions must survive on less than \$2 a day, and lack the most rudimentary access to health care, employment, housing and clean water.¹

Just because the technomillennial hype of the wiring of the planet is wildly overblown, however, is not a license to write off the concept as a mere media stunt or passing craze. Globalization may be kilometers wide and only millimeters deep, but those few millimeters are packed with the densest socio-economic circuitry imaginable. The World Bank's own data proves, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the end of the Cold War has brought not prosperity for all but a pitiless economic struggle for pole-position on the food chain of information capitalism. The neoliberalism and neocolonialism of the 1990s are the direct heir of the Manchester liberalism and colonialism of the 1890s, the only difference being that whereas Victorian rentiers extracted their Imperial textile-rents from the labor of the Great Unwashed, their postmodern analogues on Wall Street speculate on the viewing-rents of the Great Unwatched. The global in its most pejorative, polemical sense is simply the word we use to describe the meat hook realities of this struggle, namely the hideous swathe of social and ecological destruction spawned by flagrantly ill-advised IMF structural adjustment packages, toxic World Bank lending practices, and all-round neoliberal deregulation across the planet, and the corresponding enrichment of select Northamerican, East Asian and EU business interests.²

We will argue that video culture at its radical best is far more than just an urgent corrective on the global: it is the meditation and self-critical reflection upon such. Itself the site of truly planetary political and social conflicts, video culture is also the staging-grounds for new forms of multinational solidarity and community, being reinvented on a daily basis. The Ur-form of this process can be traced back to the micropolitical movements of the 1980s, when groups such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace discovered that local struggles against polluters and human rights abusers could not really

be separated from the systemic struggle against globe-trotting oil, timber and mining companies and neo-comprador governments under the thumb of IMF neoliberalism. One of the most memorable video images of the 1980s, for instance, was a satellite photographically illustrating the annihilation of the Brazilian rainforest by cattle ranchers; the local had gone irrevocably global. By the 1990s, this process was accompanied by its logical and complementary corollary, a.k.a. the localization of global issues – something visible everywhere from free-trade deals administered on behalf of the supply chains of multinational corporations (hereafter referred to as “multis”) to the creation of transnational networks of trade unions, and from the packs of well-heeled corporate lobbyists prowling the corridors of Washington, D.C. to the citizens’ movements, trade unions and peasant associations fighting against ecologically toxic and economically wasteful World Bank-financed dam projects in rural India.

Our own version of the local and global, adapted specifically for the field of video, will be the micrological and the geopolitical, respectively. The micrology is borrowed wholesale from Theodor Adorno’s negative dialectics, a set of concepts designed to locate the smallest gaps, fissures and non-identities buried within commodities, works of art, ideological formations or what have you in order to map the totalizing dynamics of late capitalism as a whole.³ Geopolitics is taken from Jameson’s notion of the geopolitical aesthetic of cinema, which is deployed here in the context of the dissolution of the Cold War power-blocs, and the rise of a quite different configuration of power-blocs and economies in their stead (a polite synonym for the decline of the Pax Americana and the rise of the European Union and East Asia). One

needs nanometric lenses to read the cosmological constellations of video, so to speak, and a theory of constellations in order to properly calibrate those lenses.

The rise of video accompanied another significant event worth exploring in some detail, namely the globalization of cultural theory generally. This is closely connected to the rise of a multinational theory-market, not to mention the institutional hothouse of the post-WW II university system in which the theory-market emerged. Pierre Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* has blazed an impressive new trail here, by outlining in compelling detail how the specific contradictions of a massively expanding French university system generated the sociological basis for the May 1968 uprising, uniquely catalyzing the specific mindsets, life-histories and psychological affiliations by which that uprising was concretely lived, felt and rhetorically justified (or symbolically repudiated). Rather than attempting to single out a single overriding element – say, the economic – as the “meaning” or overriding cause of May ‘68, Bourdieu asks that we think through the economic, the political and the psychological, all at once. The historical event functions, in essence, very much like Adorno's notion of the constellation, effectively mediating between the objective set of social relations and symbolic capitals (what Bourdieu terms the field), and the subjective set of positions, position-taking and strategic maneuvers in that field (the Bourdieusian habitus). Just as each field is in constant motion, as various schools, class fractions, or aesthetic formations compete for internal forms of symbolic capital, status and prestige as well as external position vis-à-vis other fields, so too does each habitus offer a range of dynamic positions and possibilities, as individuals, groups or entire institutions ascend or descend in the competitive hierarchy, grabbing or relinquishing market share as best they can.⁴ The point isn't to denounce the grimy

realities of competition or the existence of the theory-market per se, but to ask why they exist, to analyze how they work, and to invent ways they might be changed for the better (by increasing public access to the field in question, greater solidarity and cooperative ventures in lieu of ruinous competition, and so forth).

Abstract as all this sounds, Bourdieu's work will be enormously helpful to us in the next chapter, which will take the position that Patrick McGoochan's *The Prisoner* was to the national mass media very much what May '68 was in the field of national politics: the zero-hour of the multinational. But for now, we need to return to the question of theory for a moment, and ask some hard questions about the role of the theory-market in the post-1968 period – the trajectory, in so many words, from the theory-booms of the 1970s and 1980s to the theory-bust of the 1990s. Though a full explication of all the factors involved would require a book in its own right, two general features of the process need to be mentioned here. First of all, there is a powerful element of social geography at work in the theory-market: the Francophone thinkers (Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Lacan, to name just a few) were very much concerned with discursive issues, that is to say the mediatization of the French state and the emergence of the European Union. By contrast, the leading Northamerican thinkers (Fredric Jameson, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Gayatri Spivak and others) were much more attuned to the cultural sphere, particularly the politics of the media culture and Wall Street neoliberalism, a.k.a. the ideology of global finance capitalism.

Secondly, there's no question but that the speculative drive of the post-structuralisms and postmodernisms harmonized, on some deep level, with the real life financial speculations of Wall Street. At their best, the postmodernisms were the critical

meditation and reflection upon those speculations (as with Jameson's classic essay on postmodernism); at their worst, they were little more than the media-chatter of academic superstars shielded from the grim realities of economic austerity, skyrocketing tuition and rampant privatization – realities which had begun to undercut the very existence of autonomous national literary, philosophical and cultural departments, as tenured and full-time positions were slashed to make way for vast pools of contingent and adjunct academic workers.

The culture-workers of the 1990s were thus confronted with an unprecedented contradiction: while the total stock of conceptual and theoretical capital in their specialized fields kept right on increasing, each person's specific symbolic capital – that is, the advanced degree or tenure-track university position – was being devalued, privatized or downsized out of existence. The upshot was a phase of excruciating personal demoralization and discontent, followed by the sweeping repoliticization of the cultural field, visible everywhere from a remarkable upsurge in graduate employee and faculty unionism (involving, among other things, the establishment of grad unions throughout the University of California system) to new and interesting work in media studies, postcolonial studies and Comparative Literature. Suddenly, the most obscure zones of cultural theory had shockingly relevant things to say about the marketization of the planet, the rise of media multinationals like AOL-Time-Warner, Sony and Bertelsmann, and the blossoming media cultures of the European Union and a rapidly integrating East Asian polity. In classic Marxian fashion, the marketization of the university forced the toilers of academe to construct zones of extra-academic solidarity, in a manner similar to that of the programmers and technicians of the information culture, who struck back

against the pernicious greed and privatizing mania of the silicon rentiers by creating the electronic commons of open source software and the Web.

This is why any theory of video culture has to do more than simply take the realities of economic and social polarization seriously. To really do its job, it also has to touch base with the ways in which people are creatively rethinking or otherwise resisting that polarization, by means of a range of covert and overt solidarities. As Adorno would have put it, gloomy denunciations of the totally mediated society are not gloomy – or mediated – enough. This, of course, is to defer to Adorno's invaluable definition of the total system as a totality which is never at rest: it is dynamic, it *moves* in multiple and contradictory directions (not all of which are progressive, but not all of which are regressive, either). Just as solidarity cannot be simply imposed from without or ordained by fiat, but emerges out of the complex interactions of class consciousness, identity-politics, and legislative and juridical struggles, neither can theory peremptorily exempt itself from its own analyses or wall itself off from whatever it is attempting to investigate. Rather, it must grapple with the messy micrological resistances and uneven geopolitical solidarities of the contemporary world-system, both accessing the global history buried in local forms as well as doing justice to the localized content bound up in global forms. To paraphrase Adorno once more, cultural theory need not privilege itself over cultural praxis, any more than the latter has priority over the former; rather, each is the necessary and indispensable corrective on the other.⁵ Theory must learn, in order to teach.

There is no more striking confirmation of Adorno's insight than the literature on one of the most innovative sub-categories of video of them all, namely the aesthetics of the Web. There has been a tidal wave of books, reports and articles on cyberculture, both

in the mainstream business press and in academia. But one cannot help but notice that the first book-length study of videogames to do justice to its subject, Steven Poole's excellent *Trigger Happy*, appeared in 2000 – more than thirty-five years after the very first videogames were written by minicomputer programmers, and fifteen years after videogames became a multibillion dollar industry, with revenues rivaling those of TV and film. More is at work here than the usual time-lag between the emergence of a work of art and its critical reception or canonization (centuries in the case of the novel, decades in the case of film). Rather, the field of Web aesthetics is only mirroring a much broader set of social tendencies, namely, the all-pervading influence of a Wall Street culture which favors speculative frenzies of form over the production of content. At the peak of the Wall Street Bubble of the 1990s, the stock market value of high-tech companies – that is, their speculative or potential value twenty and thirty years down the road – was inflated wildly beyond their actual revenues (let alone minor details such as profits).

All too many accounts of the media culture in the 1990s suffer from a similar fetishism, by overvaluing the dissemination of music, images or other signifiers at the expense of what is actually being transmitted. In the musical field, this has resulted in countless analyses of how Madonna/MTV/the latest VJ cites or samples auteur film, rhythm and blues and funk music, that is to say the video marketing of music, at the expense of anything like musical content.⁶ Something similar is at work in all too many analyses of the global news media, which tend to confuse the video clips of the uprisings, rebellions and revolutions of Eastern Europe and Southeastern Asia rebroadcast by the mass media with the underground networks of local and regional media cultures in those regions which spurred those rebellions in the first place (what could be called the

cybersamizdat of media artists such as Poland's Andrzej Wajda, the Czech Republic's Jan Svankmajer, China's Yimou Zhang and countless others).

That said, contemporary media theorists such as Michael Parenti, Ben Bagdikian and Robert McChesney have done a commendable job of critiquing the ownership structures of the media, the relentless concentration of media outlets, the gutting of US public television and radio, and the firesale of the radio spectrum to well-heeled media multitis. What we have been lacking, however, is a theory of how video works resist the dictates of the media business around them, on the immanent level of aesthetic content. And resist they do, clawing, scratching and biting for their own semi-autonomous space, everywhere from pointed satires of multinational media executives (e.g. the malevolent President in *Fall Out*, the final episode of *The Prisoner*) to the creative reappropriation of marginalized or peripheral aesthetic forms (e.g. sci-fi, fantasy and horror narratives) evident in the best Japanese anime.

Probably the best way of grasping the problem is to highlight video's emergence in the late 1960s from its constituent national and international predecessors, most notably cinema. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam offer this intriguing meditation on the subject:

Contemporary video and computer technologies facilitate media jujitsu. Instead of an "esthetic of hunger", video-makers can deploy a kind of cybernetic minimalism, achieving maximum beauty and effect for minimum expense. Video switches allow the screen to be split, divided horizontally or vertically with wipes and inserts. Keys, chroma-keys, mattes and fader bars, along with computer graphics, multiply audio-visual

possibilities for fracture, rupture, polyphony. An electronic “quilting” can weave together sounds and images in ways that break with linear character-centered narrative. In such texts, multiple images can be “hung” on the screen like so many paintings in a gallery, obliging spectators to choose which image to contemplate, without losing themselves in any single image. All the conventional decorum of dominant narrative cinema – eyeline matches, position matches, the 30 degree rule, cutaway shots – is superseded by proliferating polysemy.⁷

The insight into the multilayered nature of video works, heavily mediated by a multinational technological matrix, is well taken, but the recourse to the trope of the gallery of paintings is problematic for two reasons. First, video images do not directly invoke filmic space in that sense, any more than film directly invokes painted or photographic space; rather, they occupy what might be called informatic space – most apparent in the graphics interface of the average home computer, the framing techniques of the news broadcast, or the onscreen boxscore of the sports event. Second, the crucial question of how one aesthetic mediation can negate or otherwise turn the tables on another is forestalled by the notion of “polysemy”, that is to say a formalized aesthetics or semiotics of the rupture or break, which never quite rises to its (latent) multinational content; put another way, Shohat and Stamm are outlining a theory of national cinematic forms, whereas the field of video is inherently multinational, and thus requires a rather different set of critical instruments.

We will suggest that any account of multinational content must deal with the fundamental reality of multinational consumerism, in its broadest sense as a source of

narratives of all kinds. In contrast to the great films of high modernism, which combed through mass-cultural subgenres such as the murder mystery, the romantic melodrama, the adventure thriller, and the costume epic for their raw materials, the earliest video sequences cycle through a much broader array of non-cinematic visual forms and genres. Some of the most memorable proto-video clips in the films of the late 1960s, for example, mobilize the specific visual forms pioneered by that decade – the counter-cultural street poster, the graffiti tag or protest slogan, and of course the earliest videogames – against the narrative machinery of the Hollywood blockbuster. In the case of the Western, the obvious example is Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, with its thinly-disguised allegories of bureaucratization, the crucial writing of names which unlocks the secret of the buried gold (narratives of credit accumulation, rather than land accumulation), and the stylized close-ups of the gunfighters which displace the panoramic shoot-out. Kubrick's *2001* did something similar vis-à-vis the visual forms of the Cold War space opera: thus the poignant scene of televisual mail, the suggestive span from the hand-drawn sketch which an astronaut displays to the computer HAL to the glowing, disembodied circuit maps the astronaut's later scan for faults, and of course the false-color panoramas and close shots of the astronaut's faceshield during the celebrated psychedelic sequence.

During the 1970s, video techniques began to break out of the cinematic forms in which they had emerged, by constructing their own free-standing framing and editing techniques. From a narrowly technological standpoint, one could easily assume that the crucial influence here was the emergence of the VCR, invented by Ampex all the way back in 1956 and commercialized by Sony in 1965. In reality, models affordable to the

average First World consumer – as well as a corresponding infrastructure of videocassette rental stores – did not arrive until the late 1970s. What this meant was that the major visual innovations of early video did not materialize in the field of videotaped material per se, but rather in those marginalized cultural zones of cinema excluded, for whatever reason, from the Hollywood studio system. Two of the most striking examples of this dialectic are the Hong Kong films of the late 1960s and 1970s, typified by innovative directors such as Zhang Che and Lau Kar-leong and the emergence of global superstars like Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, and the low-budget US horror film whose greatest expression was Tobe Hooper's classic *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

As Stephen Teo points out, the Hong Kong film industry pioneered the use of extended editing techniques for quite pragmatic reasons – namely, to make up for tiny special effects budgets, overworked production crews, and short production runs.⁸ The result was a quantum leap in framing techniques – something most obvious in the multiple tight shots of the martial arts contest, capable of either shrinking down the panoramic space of the Western into a kinetic field of moving objects, or else telescoping small spaces into dramatically larger ones, via stylized combat sequences and slow-motion stunts. By contrast, Hooper's shot techniques radically accelerated or decelerated the flow of time, most notably in the use of chase sequences and the twin themes of a terrifying bodily incarceration (most notoriously, the scene where the video work symbolically "watches" the modernist horror film, i.e. we're forced to watch someone forced to watch *someone else* being carved up by Leatherface) and exhilarating escapes (hinted at by the close shots of Sally's eye, juxtaposed against the moon, and sealed by

the concluding reverse tracking shot of Sally aboard the fleeing truck, reflexively realizing her liberation).

Though the sheer visual energy of the Hong Kong films certainly exceeds anything found in the toolkit of the horror film, it's significant that the latter manages to compensate by much more effective use of the sound-track (something which can be traced back to the trademark shock-theme of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, and forwards to the electrifying sound-track of Kubrick's *The Shining*). This is the genesis of *Texas Chainsaw*'s clattering machines, sputtering engines, and of course the sussurating chainsaw, that household item of consumer technology which gruesomely consumes its erstwhile consumers. Put another way, where the Hong Kong films answered for a lack of expensive scenery and set designs with ingenious stunts and rapid editing techniques, the horror film answered for a lack of studio musicians and theme music with a bone-jarring, technological sound-track, with profound affinities to the acoustic palette of 1970s punk rock.

In fact, the affinity between the horror film and punk rock runs much deeper than one might think. The horror film showcased downscaled or proletarianized teenagers and students, who experienced the freezing shock of economic austerity as low-wage workers in suburban malls and convenience stores rather than as apprentices in factories or mines; punk rock was similarly scripted by London's service-sector working-class, historically excluded from the counter-culture by deindustrialization and Thatcherism. Both explicitly turned the logic of the media culture against itself, by politicizing not merely the production of culture but its networks of distribution and dissemination as well: where the horror films negated the special-effects-laden Hollywood monster and occult

blockbuster, punk rock repudiated a predatory record and concert industry. Finally, each almost single-handedly invented two of the most lucrative cultural niche-markets of the 1980s, namely the slasher film and heavy metal music.

Such affinities tell us a great deal about why – and how – video works differ from cinematic ones. For starters, video works are clearly the product of a much more complex division of aesthetic labor: whereas the filmic auteurs operated under any number of constraints, ranging from the technological dependence on live actors (or, in the case of animation, hand-drawn cels) and raw film stock to the economic dependence on Hollywood studios or national film agencies, video works can electronically sample, alter or pastiche a vast library of prerecorded media. The price paid for this increase in complexity, however, is a much tighter degree of integration with the multinational media and consumer culture as a whole – something which has incalculable consequences for the vocation of cultural politics. Unlike film in the heyday of modernism, video does not have the option of what might be termed national-autarkic strategies of aesthetic development – the creation of specialized filmic languages or genres, ranging from the Soviet documentary montage to Italian neorealism, and from the Japanese samurai adventure to the American screwball comedy. This is because culture (defined as the sum of the tourist, media, entertainment, sports and gaming industries) has become one of the biggest, fastest-growing and most multinational consumer markets of them all. The upshot is that the cultural politics of mobilization endemic to the modernist period, where the point was to persuade, shock or otherwise bestir the audience to think and act on a monopoly-national level, has acceded to the cultural politics of interpretation, where the point is to get the audience to think and act multinationally. Put another way, whereas the

filmic modernisms narrated the seismic conflicts of Fascism, Communism, and the New Deal in terms of one's allegiance or antipathy to a fairly restricted set of nation-states, national political parties or corporate brand names, video is directly tied to the political conflicts of a genuinely global geopolity, a.k.a. multinational states, political movements and corporations.

To see how such an interpretive politics might work, one need look no further than the musical field of the 1970s. Two of the greatest sources of musical innovation in that decade were (1) the reggae compilations of Bob Marley and the Wailers (*Legend* and *Exodus*), which transformed Jamaican folk music, African American rock and roll, and the technologies of the electronic studio into the reggae dub; and (2) the Sex Pistol's stunning *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*, which retrofitted working-class blues and rock music with cutting-edge studio mixing and processing technology. Whatever their other differences, reggae and punk music were crucially dependent on their location in the world-system for their lyric content: for Marley, the resistance movement of Rastafarianism, with its diasporic links back to the African fatherland and the African American and Jamaican communities scattered across North America and Britain; for Johnny Rotten, the Cockney accent, urban camaraderie and volatile class-consciousness of the London proletariat. Each unites a radical neo-national identity cut loose, exiled or otherwise cast adrift from its traditional moorings in the traditional nation-state by means of a multinational musical palette, thereby creating a kind of "liberated zone" or space of post-colonial cultural solidarity with *other* neo-national identities. Put another way, the Sex Pistols and Bob Marley set the musical materials of the First World working-class and Third World peasant liberation movements into

motion towards one another, the former from post-colonial London and the latter from post-colonial Jamaica, thereby creating a genuinely multinational musical aesthetics.

Applying this insight to our previous discussion, it is therefore no accident that the Hong Kong films were spawned in a British colonial entrepot turned export-platform heavyweight, while *Texas Chainsaw* was produced as an independent film project in Austin, Texas, one of the leading university towns in the blossoming service-sector economy of the New South. In Hong Kong's case, the crucial elements here were (1) a displaced or otherwise deeply compromised Chinese national culture, (2) a dynamic and restless population of urban immigrants who experienced a massive economic boom but no corresponding political decolonization, and (3) direct access to the English-speaking film markets of the Chinese communities of the Pacific Rim. For the horror film, the key ingredients were clearly (1) a displaced or otherwise compromised Southern culture located at some distance from Hollywood, (2) a dynamic and restless population of students at the University of Austin, during the transition from the great student and civil rights mobilizations of the 1960s to the micropolitics of the 1970s, and (3) direct access to the post-1968 youth market, in the form of the slasher film genre.

Now, at last, we can put all the pieces of the puzzle together. For just as the horror film is the visual analogue of the punk album, so too does reggae have a formal visual equivalent: nothing less than the space of post-colonial video. The obvious example here is Bruce Lee as the breakthrough Asian American superstar, who single-handedly blazed the trail for John Woo, Chow Yun-Fat, the Chinese Fifth Generation filmmakers and countless other luminaries. But one could also point to Richard Roundtree and Mario van Peebles, who blasted open the door for the African American actors and directors of the

future; or indeed the Polish “cinema of moral anxiety” of Wajda, Zanussi and others, which achieved something similar for Eastern European media producers.

This suggests, in turn, that the great anti-colonial and revolutionary films of the 1960s have more in common with the video works of the 1970s than is commonly presupposed. Both Gillo Pontecorvo’s *Battle of Algiers* (1965) and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968) culminate in the collective spectacle of national mobilizations, wherein an urban space (the comprador city turned revolutionary citadel) is occupied by a new kind of micropolitics. This is closely linked to a revolutionary politics of gender, loosely aligned with a kind of Second Wave or juridical feminism: thus the women dressed in European garb smuggling weapons to the rebels in *Algiers*, or the love-affair subplots of *Memories*. Each reappropriates the shot techniques, editing and composition of the documentary, the existentialist-era thriller (especially film noir), and the newsreel, creating what amounts to the post-colonial version of telejournalism. The limits of this strategy were therefore the limits of telejournalism as a cultural form, or put another way, whereas telejournalism broadcasts the symbolic capital of the news announcers, broadcasters, executives and news firms involved, its postcolonial reappropriation could be said to broadcast the symbolic capital of the national-revolutionary mass party or anti-colonial movement to international markets.

During the 1960s, the latent antinomies of this strategy were not really an issue, thanks to the brutal power-politics of the US and Soviet national security states, which crushed or derailed fledgling democracies and nascent developmental states everywhere from Guatemala, Chile and Vietnam, to Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. By the 1970s, however, in the context of political decolonization and the winding-down of the

Cold War, this particular aesthetic solution was no longer a viable option. The experience of the newly independent countries was especially bitter, as the relentless pressure of the world-market transformed erstwhile revolutionary movements and parties into cash machines for neo-comprador elites, little better than the colonists they once chased out. Political decolonization, in short, turned out to be the flip side of electronic neocolonization.

The political stakes of this transformation are probably easiest to grasp in the context of what is most dated in Alea and Pontecorvo's classics: this is the trope of the existentialist urban intellectual, whose painful vacillation between the high culture of the colonial metropole and the urgent demands of the anti-colonial resistance can be said to symbolize the desperate choices of Third World nationalism and identity-formation. The national intellectual thus incarnated a particular national identity-politics in much the same way that the national mass party embodied those broad coalitions of peasants, agrarian workers, and urban comrades and intellectual sympathizers which energized the national and anti-colonial movements of the post-WW II period. Each is an allegorical narrative designed to reorganize and reconfigure a host of local, regional and international narratives into a single coherent code or set of ideologemes, or what amounts to the creation of a national cultural currency, if you will, roughly analogous to the economic kind. It's striking that the later, more radicalized works of Third World cinema (Ousmane Sembène in the 1970s or Yimou Zhang in the 1980s) explicitly critique such codes, in what amounts to a nascent solidarity with that strange new thing, the neocolonial proletariat spawned by capitalist neoliberalism and Communist industrialism alike. These are the residents of the rapidly-swelling favelas and

shantytowns, who are as ruthlessly exploited and politically marginalized by the post-colonial nation-state as the landless peasants once were by the colonial authorities, but whose habitus is heavily influenced by First World consumer goods and media culture. Culturally speaking, the vast migration from the farms to the factories in the Third World did more than just broaden the base of urban culture; it also transformed the natural world into an object of aesthetic contemplation – most famously, in the gorgeous outdoor panoramas and eroticized bodies of Yimou Zhang's *Red Sorghum*, which fluoresce with the global energies unleashed by Chinese rural industrialization.

This immediately raises the question of how multinational class structures, ideologies and identities relate to video culture. The simple answer is that there *is* no simple answer here; as Adorno noted long ago, the proletariat is an object of domination in capitalist societies, a situation which cannot be remedied by simply snapping one's fingers or issuing Party ukases. Rather, the consciousness of people who work for a living will be as varied as their modes of work and as complex as the division of labor itself, registering everything from the crassest xenophobia and consumerism to quite sophisticated scientific and cultural critiques (not to mention the ubiquitous micropolitics of gender, ethnic affiliation, and family structures). This is true even of those societies which notoriously claimed to have abolished class, e.g. the Communist regimes, which promulgated the ideology of proletarian rule while practicing the reality of autarkic proletarianization.

What differentiates the contemporary experience of class from anything in the past is the fact that, for the first time in human history, the majority of the human beings on the planet live in cities and exist outside of the agrarian economy. Significant enclaves

of rural and peasant culture do of course continue to exist, but are far more tightly integrated with the urban centers of accumulation than ever before, something which has led to new types of popular mobilizations *against* formerly revolutionary one-party states and crossing all manner of national borders, everywhere from Ken Saro-wiwa and the Ogoni people in Nigeria to the Uw'e people of Colombia locked in struggle against Occidental Petroleum, and to the Zapatistas of southern Mexico. Urbanization also transformed the one-party state from within, spurring both its complete abolition (as in the case of the Eastern bloc) as well as its drastic modification. Thus in 1949, the Chinese Communists were the leading expropriator of the landlord class, while the Nationalists were its leading defenders; five decades later, both parties had evolved into astonishingly similar developmental technocracies.

Probably the best strategy here is to think of multinational class identity as a hazy, provisional habitus, locked into struggle with its more organized monopoly and national analogues, and located in a multinational cultural field littered with monopoly-national and neo-national forms. This enables us to avoid overly simplistic questions about the immediate political stance of a given aesthetic work (for or against the Party, for or against neoliberalism), by grasping the fact of geopolitical location as a crucial structural feature of video culture. The leading cultural works of post-colonial video, for example, had to sublate the broadcasting monopoly and cinematic heritage of the one-party state and Third World nationalism alike in order to create their own cultural space. The rather different location of the earliest First World video works, situated in the core economies of consumer capitalism, dictated a rather different strategy; but to see how different, we need to turn to Patrick McGoohan's classic series, *The Prisoner*.

Footnotes to Chapter 1

1. The World Bank defines low-income as annual per capita income of \$755 or less, middle-income as \$756-\$2995, and high-income as \$2995 and above. The middle-income countries have the greatest share of the world population, 2.7 billion residents; by contrast, 2.4 billion live in low-income and 891 million in high-income countries. *The 2000-2001 World Development Report*, World Bank (174-175, 311-312).

2. Though the World Bank and the IMF publicly insist that the poor have made great progress under their tutelage, the World Bank's own statistics prove otherwise. Despite heavy regulations and strong state intervention in the economy, the Second and Third World grew very rapidly indeed from 1945-1980. Since then, the vast majority of these countries have been subjected to punishing structural adjustment packages by the IMF; the typical prescription is fiscal orthodoxy, a decline in real wages, deregulation of the financial sphere, abolition of national tariffs, and lush subsidies for well-heeled foreign investors. The results bespeak a planetary developmental disaster: annual per capita growth in consumption in low-income countries declined to only 1.4% from 1980-1998. In middle-income countries, per capita growth was 2.2%, which at first glance seems comparable to that of high-income countries (also 2.2%). These figures, however, include India and China, which grew at 2.7% and 7.2% rates, respectively, from 1980-98. Both of these countries pursued economic policies which broke every rule in the IMF's neoliberal playbook, i.e. rejected fiscal austerity, emphasized state-owned enterprises, carefully regulated financial markets, and protected domestic markets. Excluding these two, 95 out

of the remaining 107 countries listed in the World Bank report saw per capita consumption levels fall (in some cases, quite drastically) relative to those of the richest countries. If this is success, one shudders to think of what failure might look like. *The 2000-2001 World Development Report*, World Bank (277).

3. Adorno's classic formulation of the vocation of a negative (read: multinational) dialectics poses this issue in terms of the antipodes of the micrology and the macrology: "Immersion into the particular, dialectical immanence raised to an extreme, requires as one of its moments the freedom to step out of the object, too, the freedom which the claim of identity cuts off. Hegel would have abjured this; he relied upon the complete mediation in objects. In the praxis of cognition, the resolution of the irresolvable, the moment of such transcendence of thought comes to light in that solely as a micrology does it employ macrological means. The demand for committalness [Verbindlichkeit] without system is that for thought-models. These are not of a merely monadological sort. The model strikes the specific and more than the specific, without dissolving it into its more general master-concept. To think philosophically is so much as to think in models; negative dialectics is an ensemble of model-analyses." (My translation). Theodor Adorno. *Negative Dialektik*. Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1973 (39).

4. Applying this insight to the rise of cultural studies more generally, it's no accident that new literary fields such as New Criticism, existentialism, and the canon of Western European modernism all emerged in the 1950s at the exact moment that the post-WW II English and literature departments were confronted with the task of educating swelling

numbers of undergraduates. The transformation of the theoretical field was part and parcel of an intergenerational struggle between professors, administrators and educators, caught up in the transition away from the Ivy League model of training a narrow, privileged elite, and towards the publicly-funded, heavily militarized mass research university. One can observe a similar dialectic at work in the 1960s, where the rise of structuralism, semiotics and micropolitics went hand-in-hand with the mediatization, multiculturalization (and of course repoliticization) of the university system.

5. “Theory and intellectual experience require their reciprocal effect. This does not contain answers for everything, but reacts to a world which is false to its innermost core. Theory would have no jurisdiction over what would be free of the bane of such. The ability to move is essential to consciousness, not an accidental characteristic. It signifies a double procedure: that of the inside out, the immanent process, the authentically dialectical, and a free one, something unfettered which steps out of dialectics, as it were. Neither of them are however disparate. The unregimented thought has an elective affinity to dialectics, which as critique of the system recalls to mind what would be outside of the system; and the energy which dialectical movement in cognition unleashes is that which rebels against the system. Both positions of consciousness are connected to one another through each other’s critique, not through compromise.” (My translation). Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*. Suhrkamp Verlag: Frankfurt, 1972 (42). It’s one of the most hopeful signs of the late 1990s that a wide range of activists and thinkers are starting to take Adorno’s point very seriously indeed. Post-colonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Aijiz Ahmad are beginning to ask the same unsettling questions about

multinational culture and identity as First World gender theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, while the work of economic critics such as Doug Henwood and Patrick Bond in critiquing Wall Street neoliberalism is increasingly informing (and being informed by) the theoretical insights of sociologists such as Boris Kagarlitsky, David Harvey and Pierre Bourdieu.

6. My own feeling, shared by many hip hop cognoscenti, is that the real musical innovations of the 1980s and 1990s were made by hip hop artists, e.g. Public Enemy's album *It Takes a Nation of Millions... to Hold Us Back*, Cypress Hill's eponymous first album, and Kool Keith's *Dr. Octagon*. Unfortunately, no really comprehensive musicology of late 20th century hip hop has yet been written.

7. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

8. Stephen Teo, *Hong Kong Cinema*. London: British Film Institute, 1997.