

Spectral Times: The Ghost Film As Historical Allegory

Bliss Cua Lim

Ghosts call our calendars into question. The temporality of haunting, through which events and people return from the limits of time and mortality, differs sharply from the modern concept of a linear, progressive, universal time. The hauntings recounted by ghost narratives are not merely instances of the past reasserting itself in a stable present, as is usually assumed; on the contrary, the ghostly return of traumatic events precisely troubles the boundaries of past, present, and future, and cannot be written back to the complacency of a homogeneous, empty time.

The ghost always presents a problem, not merely because it might provoke disbelief, but because it is only admissible insofar as it can be domesticated by a modern concept of time.¹ Modern time consciousness can be characterized as disenchanted (the supernatural has no historical agency); empty (a single universal history includes all events, irrespective of cultural disparity); and homogeneous (history transcends the “singularity” of events, because it exists

prior to them). From the standpoint of modern historical consciousness, then, “‘supernatural’ forces can claim no agency in our narratives.”²

There is a tension involved in films that use ghost stories as a provocation to historical consciousness. Ghost films that are also historical allegories make incongruous use of the vocabulary of the supernatural to articulate historical injustice, referring to “social reality” by recourse to the undead. Such ghost narratives productively explore the dissonance between modernity’s disenchanting time and the spectral temporality of haunting in which the presumed boundaries between past, present, and future are shown to be shockingly permeable.

In *Rouge* [*Yanzhi Kou*] (dir. Stanley Kwan, 1987) and *Haplos* [*Caress*] (dir. Antonio Jose “Butch” Perez, 1982), ghostly women embody a strong notion of spatiotemporal nonsynchronism—the existence of noncontemporaneous aspects of social life that cannot be fully translated into modernity’s disenchanting time. A courtesan from the 1930s walks by a Hong Kong shopping mall; soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army in World War II are concealed by the same dense forest foliage in which Filipino revolutionaries of the New People’s Army lie hidden. Whether or not we realize it, we are all familiar with a diluted, historicist idea of nonsynchronism, of disparate temporal allegiances coexisting in a fractured “present”: this is what makes it possible for some people to be hip while others are old-fashioned, to decry one man as backward and another as forward-looking, although all these people are considered to exist “at the same time.” This conventional view of nonsynchronism actually preserves diachrony even when it speaks of simultaneity (by striving to hierarchize in chronological ordering social and cultural practices that exist “all at once”), and it is this scarcely visible premise that gives current trends their urgency, the fashionable its edge, and the avant-garde its sense of newness.

Yet the ghost narrative opens the possibility of a radicalized concept of noncontemporaneity; haunting as ghostly return precisely refuses the idea that things are just “left behind,” that the past is inert and the present uniform. Put simply, the ghost forces the point of nonsynchronism. It is this challenge to received ideas of time that makes the specter a particularly provocative figure for the claims of history.

The ghost narratives in *Rouge* and *Haplos* function as an allegorical frame in which an almost-forgotten history becomes newly meaningful as a kind of haunting or ghostly return. These ghost films draw from their respective cultural discourses in order to vivify the “present’s” accountability to the concerns of the “past,” and in so doing call into question the ways in which modern homogeneous time conceives of those very temporal categories.

In these ghost films, nostalgia and allegory coalesce, promoting a radicalized historical consciousness that counters the blinkeredness of historicism and modernity’s homogenous time. These ghost films’ figuration of non-synchronism must therefore be considered in relation to several mutually entangled issues, all relating to the implications of figuring the historical through the spectral: the idea of ghostly time in relation to a radicalized idea of noncontemporaneity that refutes the empty, homogeneous time of modernity and the universalizing narrative of progress; Jacques Derrida’s discussion of justice as a “being-with specters”; and Walter Benjamin’s notion of being accountable to an oppressed past (disputing the history of the victors) and to its unfulfilled horizons of expectation (the weak messianic power in us all).³

The culturally specific reservoir of phantoms from which each film draws allows us to explore the ghost film’s diverse articulations of historical nonsynchronism. In *Haplos*, the folkloric interferes with the modern, interweaving phantoms from the Japanese occupation in World War II with the guerrilla conflicts of the 1980s. In this film, the haunting repetition of a traumatic past comes to be experienced with the “singularity” of a “first time,” renewing a sense of responsibility and solidarity toward the injustices endured by those long dead.⁴ For its part, *Rouge*’s deft allusions to classical Chinese ghost literature frames the spectral heroine as a resonant figuration of nostalgia for the end of an era, an allegorical cipher for the demands of a radicalized historical consciousness.

Nostalgic Allegory

In *Haplos*, a man recently returned to his provincial hometown in the Philippines falls in love with the restless spirit of a woman who died in World War II. At the threshold of the forest (*bukana ng gubat*), he discerns a charming,



Figure 1 Spatial palimpsest in *Rouge*: Across a shop window, a shadowy glimpse into the old Tai Ping Theater

old-fashioned mansion where others see only ruins. Inside this phantom house, he and his spectral sweetheart hear gunshots: the man assumes it is the sound of present-day crossfire between government troops and insurgent guerrillas; but the ghost, for whom the forest is alive not with Communists but with colonizers, believes she hears Japanese soldiers nearby.

In *Rouge*, the ghost of a courtesan who seeks her lost lover among the living weeps at the drab sight of Hong Kong's former red-light district, Shitangzui, in 1987. In one of the film's most telling images, the revenant walks past a shop window, and we see reflected on it, as if on a screen, the shadowy performance of an old Cantonese opera at the theater that the storefront has replaced. In a visual palimpsest, this film sequence depicts one space as splintered yet whole: an antiseptic shopping mall in the late 1980s, in whose dark glass we glimpse the warm glamour of the demolished Tai Ping Theater (fig. 1).

These two moments, from two rather different films, are arresting in their nostalgic inscription of postcolonial histories within the context of the ghost narrative. For these ghostly women, space is a spectral surface of only limited opacity, behind which other times and places are poignantly apparent. To these anachronistic women, and to those who come to love them and partake of their spectral vision, there can be no absolute sense of time and place—locales are “spatial palimpsests” traversed by divergent temporalities,⁵ and time does not merely move forward; it is subject to repetition, nonsynchronism, and return.

It has been suggested that “the paradigm for the allegorical work is the palimpsest” because, like the palimpsest, allegory is a textual doubling that allows one stratum to be construed via another. Typically operating in the perception of a gap, allegory’s most “fundamental impulse” is to “rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear,”⁶ that is, to alleviate a sense of historical estrangement.

Whether in urban Hong Kong, where the frenzied pace of construction “suggest[s] that space is almost like a kind of very expensive magnetic tape which can be erased and reused,” built over with more lucrative skyscrapers,⁷ or in a rural Philippine town, where decaying architectural styles are briefly glimpsed in their old splendor by a ghost-besotted man, spatial transience is quintessentially allegorical. To Benjamin, the allegorical exemplar is the ruin: “Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.” *Haplos*’s ruined old house, slowly disintegrating into the surrounding brush, and *Rouge*’s opera house, materializing across the window of the shop built over it, exemplify his idea that “in the ruin *history has physically merged into the setting*”⁸ (my emphasis); in other words, temporality is inseparable from spatiality. With its roots deep in the kind of exegesis that proved the relevance of the Old Testament to Christianity by “rewriting the Jewish textual and cultural heritage in a form usable for Gentiles,” allegory’s temporality is retrospective and redemptive.⁹ Though in a sense, this idea of a retrospective look and the present’s concern with the past does adhere to historicist linearity, its emphasis on co-presence, on vivifying rather than surmounting the past, pulls allegory in the direction of historical nonsynchronism. Thus allegory’s time is not one but many: a time of decrepitude as allegorically contemplated and vivified through the lens of another.

In both *Rouge* and *Haplos*, this allegorical contemplation of one time through another can be characterized as nostalgic, that is, as infused with the pain and pleasure of remembering what is gone beyond recovery. The word *nostalgia*, from the Greek *νοστος* (*nostos*, return home) and *αλγος* (*algos*, pain or sorrow), was originally a seventeenth-century medical term for pathological sadness or homesickness among exiles.¹⁰ Nostalgia's formerly spatial dimension (a longing for a place) gradually became compounded by a temporal dimension (a desire to return to a lost time). Nostalgia is frequently denounced for being a distanced, idealized remembrance which "appropriates" its object "for an alien time and place." Yet the distorting distance of nostalgia is not always detrimental. Proximity, as well as distance, is a distorting relation, so that nostalgia offers an antidote to a view tainted by too much intimacy, proffering the longer view of things, a perspective "invigorated through absence."¹¹ Like allegory, nostalgia straddles the line between historicism and nonsynchronism: it betrays a kinship to a linear, teleological time, seeing a stable past at a remove from the present. But its appropriative revisiting of the past also pulls away from the notion of chronologically ordered and separate times and tends toward a nonsynchronous understanding of temporal cohabitation and coimplication. Despite the widespread commodification of nostalgia as an effective merchandising trend,¹² in *Rouge* and *Haplos* nostalgia offers the possibility of taking Benjamin's "tiger's leap into the past" in order to see that the past is never merely outmoded.¹³ Nostalgia, then, like allegory, is a kind of doubling—not one that restores an original meaning, but one that operates from a distance.¹⁴ The selfsame distance that allows nostalgia to appropriate the affective value of an object for another time is that very distance that enables allegorical objects to be seized, rescued, and invested with new meanings. This is why in both *Haplos* and *Rouge* nostalgia and allegory engender an intense appreciation for spaces that have been built over or have decayed. It is no accident that these films cultivate historical consciousness through the lens of both allegory and nostalgia: the point to redeeming the value of something at a distance, just as it has declined, is that there is no way to apprehend it objectively, without distortion. In these films, nostalgia is not mere distortion but rather a position, an allegorical one, from which to read and revalue the ruins around which ghosts have gathered.

Nonsynchronism and Ghostly Time

Whenever the secular concept of history encounters other understandings of the world, it narrates “the ‘agency of the supernatural’ [as] a problem from the past surviving, for good and understandable historical reasons, in a disenchanted present.”¹⁵ In spite of its relatively recent provenance, modern time consciousness has become so naturalized that it assimilates other forms of historical consciousness as a precursor to itself, rather than admitting their only partial translatability as incommensurable temporal paradigms. As Dipesh Chakrabarty explains:

It is not that historians and philosophers of history are unaware of such a commonplace as the claim that modern historical consciousness, or for that matter academic history, [are] genres of recent origin. . . . *The naturalism of historical time lies in the belief that everything can be historicized.* So while the nonnaturalness of history, the discipline, is granted, the assumed universal applicability of its method entails a further assumption: that it is always possible to assign people, places, and objects to a naturally existing, continuous flow of historical time. . . . It does not matter if any of these areas were inhabited by peoples . . . [who] did not have a “sense of chronological history”—as distinct from other forms of memories and understandings of historicity—before European arrival. Contrary to whatever they may have thought and however they may have organized their memories, *the historian has the capacity to put them back into a time we are all supposed to have shared, consciously or not.* History as a code thus invokes a natural, homogeneous, secular, calendrical time without which the story of human evolution/civilization—a single human history, that is—cannot be told. In other words, *the code of the secular calendar that frames historical explanations has this claim built into it: that independent of culture or consciousness, people exist in historical time.*¹⁶ (my emphasis)

Modern historical consciousness assumes that its own concept of time—as “godless, continuous, empty and homogeneous”—is a natural “structure of generality.” This explains why even the nonsecular and the nonmodern can be relegated to a position in this history. Modern time is thus projected in every direction to encompass even what exists outside of and prior

to its minting as a concept, posing as the universal narrative to which all specific instances can be subsumed. The naturalization of modern secular time, which allows it to recast other forms of consciousness as flawed precursors in a world-historical narrative of progress, means that history becomes understood as a process of evolution, and modernization is no longer situated in its cultural and historical contexts; rather, it is upheld as a “spatio-temporally neutral model for processes of social development in general” to be adopted by all peoples and cultures.¹⁷ History thus comes to be seen as a uniform process, so that even where “historically nonsynchronous developments” are recognized, they are recast into the “chronological simultaneity” of the same modern, secular calendar.¹⁸

Nonsynchronism or noncontemporaneity is a crucial issue to ghost narratives (and to fantastic discourse more generally), inasmuch as this genre dramatizes the encounter between occluded modes of consciousness and the dominant experiential paradigms of the rational, postmodern world we know. Haunting or ghostly return insists that “prior” modes of consciousness are never completely surmounted or occluded, and that social reality depends on a fractious consensus. The spectral estranges our predisposed ways of experiencing space, time, and history and hauntingly insinuates that more worlds than one exist in the world we think we know; times other than the present contend with each other in the disputed Now. Nostalgic ghost films like *Rouge* and *Haplos* posit a disjointed present, provocatively insinuating the nonsynchronism of spatiotemporal aspects of social life.

Ernst Bloch defines nonsynchronism as “unsurmounted remnants of older economic being and consciousness,” a concept derived from Marx’s idea of “unequal rates of development.” Bloch’s illuminating aphorism, “Not all people exist in the same Now,” pertains to his pejorative dismissal of classes who turn away from the present as “torpid . . . remnants.” Lacking a synchronous appreciation of the contradictions of capitalism, such classes, in Bloch’s view, would never further a Marxist revolution.¹⁹

My difficulty with Bloch’s formulation is the imputation that some people fail to live synchronously with the Now while others succeed. It seems rather more to the point, if we are to take seriously the Marxian axiom of uneven, nonsynchronous social formations (traces of feudalism in the world of corporations or, to take a filmic example, a vampire slayer at work in a

department store), to read Bloch's formulation as the unsettling realization that *all* people do not exist in one and the same Now. Consequently, there is not one historical moment but many, all wrestling with one another in the far from singular present. Yet even this notion of simultaneity, which lies at the heart of the insight of nonsynchronism, and which should irremediably complicate the pastness of the past and the presentness of the present, has itself been enlisted in the service of an evolutionary world history, contained by historicism's concept of the contemporary within a telos of progress whose colonialist logic codes the subaltern as backward and obsolescent.²⁰ Reinhart Koselleck argues that the development of modern time consciousness in the eighteenth century depended crucially on the perceived "noncontemporaneity of diverse, but in the chronological sense, simultaneous histories" that arose from imperialist global expansion:

The geographical opening up of the globe brought to light various but coexisting cultural levels which were, through the process of synchronous comparison, then ordered diachronically. Looking from civilized Europe to a barbaric America was a glance backward. . . . Comparisons promoted the emergence in experience of a world history, which was increasingly interpreted in terms of progress. A constant impulse leading to progressive comparison was drawn from the fact that individual peoples or states . . . were found to be in advance of the others. . . . This fundamental experience of progress, embodied in a singular concept around 1800, is rooted in the knowledge of noncontemporaneities which exist at a chronologically uniform time. . . . The contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous, initially a result of overseas expansion, became a basic framework for the progressive construction of the growing unity of world history.²¹

The disparity or incommensurability between other forms of historical consciousness and imperialism's own was reabsorbed into the terms of a single, universal history that declared some peoples advanced and others backward; this, in turn, led to politically charged ideas of being alternately forward-looking or out-of-date. The notion of progress is founded on this containment of noncontemporaneity because it privileges the properly future-oriented subject as an agent of history rather than the "un-modern"

other, who is considered to have a good deal of catching up to do. The modern view of progress is thus premised on a containment of the insight of socio-cultural noncontemporaneity whereby the recognition of nonsynchronism is subdued into world-historical sameness (the presumption that enables the noncontemporaneous to be ordered along the same chronological line).

By critiquing modern time consciousness in this way I do not mean to say that only postcolonial nations have suffered the imposition of modern homogeneous time. This is far from the case. The drama of other forms of consciousness being supplanted by the modern paradigm has certainly been enacted in European and North American contexts as well. Ghosts and hauntings trouble the notion that, in the West and elsewhere, modernity was experienced in exactly the same way, accomplishing a complete secularization, rationalization, and disenchantment of the world. In Europe and North America, for instance, it is ironic that the technological euphoria that greeted the nineteenth century's optical innovations—magic lanterns, photography, X rays, and finally, moving pictures—fueled a widespread association between photography and ghosts.²² Science and specters, though often pitted against each other, were paradoxically allied: "Science could not kill the ghost easily," but rather wedded the phantom to the machine.²³

To insist that modern time consciousness is simply European time consciousness elides the specificities of various European communities' encounters with modernity. To decry modernity as solely Western is to perpetrate, as Enrique Dussel has provocatively argued, another kind of Eurocentrism, a Eurocentrism that attributes modernity uniquely to Europe because of supposedly exceptional internal attributes that enabled the West to develop modernity and spread it throughout the world. But modernity is more accurately thought of as a *planetary* phenomenon that grows out of a particular world-historical system in which Europe tried to manage the "world" while establishing itself as its imperialist center. What is finally debilitating about an East versus West understanding of modernity is that it forgets that colonialism, and the modernity of the cultural center that managed it, is not an independently European dynamic—it is a global dynamic. The development of modernity as the culture of the European center emerges not autochthonously but rather as a technology (for managing and establishing the relation, center-periphery) of a Europe that was annexing and expropriating

other territories and peoples for its benefit. That is, European modernity was not the result of an exceptional innate superiority that allowed Europe to dominate the rest of the world. Instead it was a specific set of management strategies that emerged in the course of Europe's establishing itself as a superhegemonic center to its colonized peripheries.²⁴ Thus, to draw attention to the colonialist underpinnings of modern time consciousness is not to impute that modernity is simply European and that only postcolonial nations have endured the violent incursions of modernity (clearly modernity strove to gain dominance in Europe as well), but rather to characterize the planetary overdetermination of this world-historical consciousness.

Returning once more to the ghost film's striking figuration of nonsynchronism or noncontemporaneity—unmistakably evinced in the temporality of haunting, in which living and dead or past and present cohabit—the crucial question for us becomes: Is it possible or even viable to rescue the concept of noncontemporaneity from its kinship with the notion of progress in order to forge a different conception of history? Can we redeem the insights of nonsynchronism from the elitism of modernity's consciousness of time? To even begin to speak of radical noncontemporaneity is to strain at the limits of language, for we must speak of the present and the simultaneous even as we attempt to denaturalize such notions. One key to redeeming the insights of nonsynchronism is to preserve the sense of a scandalous "outside" that disjoins the normativity of modern temporality—to take, with the ghost film, the tiger's leap into spectral time.

What is not modern (for example, an occluded view of history in which the supernatural has a part, as opposed to a completely rationalized and disenchanted world) is not simply premodern—in most metropolitan centers today many will admit to believing in ghosts, thus revealing that the ascendancy of rational secularism is far from complete. Recasting the nonmodern as a precursor to modernity therefore involves an act of translation. However necessary and expedient this translation is to the way we live according to the stable past, present, and future of modern calendars, Chakrabarty exhorts us not to forget that translation is at work whenever we speak of supernaturalism in relation to modern time:

The prefix pre in precapital . . . is not a reference to what is simply chronologically prior on an ordinal, homogeneous scale of time. Pre-capitalist is a hyphenated identity; it speaks of a particular relationship to capital marked by the tension of difference in the horizons of time. . . . [Precapital] *exists within the temporal horizon of capital and is at the same time something that also disrupts the continuity of this time by suggesting another time that is not on the same secular, homogeneous calendar* (which is why what is precapital is not chronologically prior to capital, that is to say, one cannot assign it to a point on the same continuous time line). . . . *Subaltern histories are therefore constructed within a particular kind of historicized memory, one that remembers History itself as a violation*, an imperious code that accompanied the civilizing process that the European Enlightenment inaugurated in the eighteenth century as a world-historical task. . . . The point is to ask how this seemingly imperious, all-pervasive code might be deployed or thought so that we have at least a glimpse of its own finitude, a vision of what might constitute an *outside* to it.²⁵ (my emphasis)

Although it remains a practical necessity to translate different worlds and temporalities into the terms of modern time consciousness, students of post-colonial history must keep the finitude of secular time in mind. We must retain a sense of “scandal in every translation” so that the requisite paraphrasing of other worlds and temporalities as premodern and precapitalist—when these were not so much prior to as outside of, other than, and unassimilable to modern time—never goes entirely unchallenged.²⁶

Ghost stories and fantastic discourse have typically been conceptualized as a response to the desacralization of modern life, a form of mythic survival in a demythologized age, or the return of repressed, surmounted modes of thought.²⁷ These perspectives remain caught in a linear view of history, so that narratives of the supernatural become a flat cipher for a premodern mythic world intruding on the disenchanting present, the obsolescent trace of tradition, or an eclipsed “nature” prior to the domination of instrumental reason. Yet a perspective attentive to the scandal at the heart of the ghost film recognizes that ghosts are never simply premodern or precapitalist. Haunting signals that interference, that “scandalous,” “unbearable eruption

into the real world” that is the hallmark of the fantastic.²⁸ In the fantastic, competing contexts of experience, discontinuous epistemological paradigms, are concretely represented, figured, or made visible. The fantastic compellingly reminds us that “world is a context, not a thing”;²⁹ it represents overarching experiential paradigms as concrete worlds vying for ascendancy, thus scandalizing habituated notions and provoking productive misgivings about the limits of what can be truly known about our world.

It is this sense of an affront to the world we know that Derrida pursues in his discussion of Hamlet’s declaration (upon seeing a ghost) that “the time is out of joint.” The specter exceeds conventional knowledge in that it collapses departure and return, life and death, presence and absence, seen and unseen, death and survival. The apparition can be grasped “only in a dislocated time of the present, at the joining of a radically dis-jointed time, without certain disjunction . . . or determinable conjunction.”³⁰ Indeed Derrida’s ghostly time is precisely replete with the disturbing sense of riotous temporality of which Chakrabarty spoke. The specter is far from a housebroken past that merely persists in the present; it signals a temporality that deviates from modernity’s empty, homogeneous, and disenchanting time: “A spectral moment, *a moment that no longer belongs to time*, if one understands by this word the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present: ‘now,’ future present). We are questioning in this instant, we are asking ourselves about *this instant that is not docile to time, at least to what we call time*”³¹ (my emphasis).

Ghostly return is far more than the echo of a superceded past in the present as construed by a linear, progressive time; rather, it is that “trace,” that impossible “survival” which “disjoins the living present.” It is “what makes the present waver.”³² This wavering is precisely the inscription of fantastic scandal at the limits of modern temporality’s field of vision. Spectral time allows nonsynchrony to speak of the limits of time as we know it, without transcribing it as a mere diachronic precursor to our own more enlightened age. *A ghostly temporality lacks historicism’s docility*. Instead, ghostly time remains decidedly discomfiting; what haunts us is not written back into certainty as something backward or obsolete that persists in the course of an evolutionary march to universal progress. Quite the converse: the specter shatters the self-evidence of our own world and time.

Ghost Films

Haplos and *Rouge*, two ghost films that thematize romances between ghosts and mortals, are centered around female specters who return to redress a past grievance (the betrayal of lovers or death by foul play). In these films, the living and the dead become placeholders for a nonsynchronous meeting of divergent temporalities and frames of consciousness. The renewed legibility of the ethos of 1930s Hong Kong in *Rouge* or of wartime conflict in *Haplos* is made possible by our nostalgic fascination with ghostly women, whose long memories and deep grievances make nearly forgotten injustices palpable once more. These ghost films realize nostalgic allegory's capacity to raise the specter of history. In the words of one spectral heroine to her mortal lover, meeting a ghost can make "people long dead seem more alive to us than anyone else." In the nostalgic allegory of ghostly return, what is dead and long past comes to life, old concerns acquire a new urgency and relevance, and a radicalized historical consciousness fathoms the past's entanglement with immediate concerns.

Haunting, or the specter's act of returning from death, is a refusal to complete the sentence, a worrying of historical knowledge that undermines the capacity of death to resolve the undecidability of life in semantic coherence.³³ By repeating (via haunting) events thought to have been finished or laid to rest, the ghost film has the generic potential to unsettle the linear time of conventional narrative. Whereas most stories serve up a beginning that is different from its ending, the ghost narrative has a tendency to transgress the principles of narrative linearity without becoming antinarrative (as in avant-garde and experimental films). Its fragmentation of time still lies within the purview of the spectator's narrative engagement, because the narrative (which conventionally follows the actions of a character) is merely tracing the movements of a ghost, yet in so doing follows her cyclical, spectral temporality, one that departs from linear narrative time.³⁴ *Haplos*'s director has said that for him *Haplos* was a means of exploring themes of "repetition and time," which the cinema, with its capacity to play with temporality by means of editing, is best suited to explore.³⁵ Thus, like Derrida's specter, the ghost film's stories "begin by coming back";³⁶ this is literally what ghost films such as *Haplos* and *Rouge* depict, because in them a betrayed past confronts its



Figure 2 In *Haplos*, Al meets Auring, the demure and beautiful specter, at the cemetery. Courtesy Antonio Jose "Butch" Perez

future (our present), and discovers that it is other than had been hoped for. The ghost film allows characters (and those spectators who identify with them) to experience *time with the ghost*. It is to the specific contours of this scandalous, disjointed experience that I now turn.

***Haplos*: Local Spirits and Returning Lovers**

In the provincial Filipino town of Buendia, Al, newly returned from migrant work in Saudi Arabia, begins a romantic affair with a childhood friend, Cristy, an assertive "modern woman," who has recently returned from Manila to establish a government family planning center. The film thus characterizes Buendia as a town in the grips of modernizing change, its town square freshly transformed by the offices of a telephone company and a population control center, its surrounding areas increasingly militarized

by the Philippine Constabulary (PC). Linked by their status as “tourists in their own home,” Cristy and Al are agents and embodiments of the town’s experience of change and of new patterns of departure and return from both center and periphery.³⁷ Their flirtatious banter centers on a shared nostalgia for the Buendia of their childhood, so that they epitomize “the anguish of an urbanite without a hometown, or of one robbed of a hometown.”³⁸

Al and Cristy fall in love, but their affair is complicated by a third figure of return. While visiting his mother’s grave, Al meets Auring, a beautiful, demure woman dressed in white (fig. 2). Al is powerfully drawn to her, increasingly forsaking the town and Cristy for Auring’s old-fashioned mansion in the woods.³⁹ It becomes apparent that Auring is the ghost of a woman who had been brutally raped and killed in the forest by Japanese soldiers at the end of World War II as her wounded sweetheart, Basilio, watched, powerless to help. Basilio, a nationalist guerrilla, survived and became the town’s old drunk, now known as Mang Ilyong.⁴⁰ The love triangle/quadrangle of Al, Cristy, and Auring (with Mang Ilyong as a submerged fourth player whose age bars him from romantic overtones) reaches a crisis when Al and Cristy discover Auring’s true identity. Al cannot choose between the two women. In a tension-filled denouement, Auring hears crossfire between present-day Communist insurgents and the PC, runs terrified into the forest, and relives her rape and murder at the hands of Japanese soldiers, this time with Al looking on. Al sees her house burned by nationalist guerrillas who are punishing her parents for collaborating with the Japanese colonizers. When Al is rescued by the townsfolk, he is shocked and uncommunicative. Desperate to help him, Cristy goes back to the forest, walks into Auring’s phantom house (which is now magically whole again), and pleads for the ghost’s assistance in Al’s recovery.

The last images of the happy modern couple reunited have a core of disquiet, because Cristy has had to enlist Auring’s aid. The pivotal scene, with Cristy donning Auring’s garb and assuming her manner, depicts Cristy’s voluntary possession by the spirit of her rival. This possession ending, which preserves the love triangle under the aegis of the couple (spiritual possession is not without sexual undercurrents), is deeply offensive for choosing to eclipse Cristy, the strong, autonomous, sexually promiscuous woman, with Auring, the epitome of an emphatically conventional femininity, a substitution of



Figure 3 A publicity image frames *Haplos* as a love triangle between ghost and mortals. Courtesy Ricardo Lee

gender roles to which Cristy is shown to aspire (fig. 3). Cristy's desire to possess and be possessed by Auring does not so much cast doubt on her gender identity as much as it implies that, on some level, nostalgia has led both Cristy and Al to an uncritical preference for a patriarchal femininity fettered in the home. The happy resolution is thus only a smokescreen for an ending steeped

in despair. The modern couple who embrace the ghost are both deeply vexed characters: Al is an exponent of troubled masculinity, by virtue of his entry into the vicissitudes of migrant labor; and Cristy, the politically compromised former activist, is facing the consequences of her “new morality” with an unwanted, illegitimate pregnancy in a prudish town. For such characters, at variance with themselves and with their life choices, the nostalgic longing for Auring’s seemingly uncomplicated femininity indicates a frustration with their own unsatisfying options in the present and their fantasy of recovering lost (and deeply patriarchal) sexual mores.⁴¹

The film is structured around distinct, mutually implicated times and spaces: the 1940s and 1980s, the Philippines and Saudi Arabia, Buendia and Manila, rebel-infested/ghostly forest and law-abiding, urbanized town. Al, the returned overseas worker, is both a newcomer and a familiar face. His early conversations in the film cue us to the film’s subtle understanding of place: whenever he is asked about Saudi Arabia, he never gives the same answer, and his divergent evocations of the country are clearly determined by his ties to different people. In response to his friend Gorio’s eager questions about Al’s sexual adventures overseas with “white leghorn” (a racist/sexist epithet for white women), Al says, “Women are forbidden to us in Saudi, so I didn’t get much sex. We would pretend we were sick because there was an Australian nurse in the hospital who slept with the patients, out of pity for them, she said. . . . But once, she was caught with a Filipino patient. . . . She was decapitated. The man was castrated.”⁴²

Al’s account of the sexual policing of Filipino men working in the Gulf adheres closely to the anecdotes of male Filipino contract workers returning from the Middle East, accounts which document the physical and psychological costs of their insertion into global labor. From 1975 to 1983, the time in which *Haplos* is set, Saudi Arabia was the top recruiter of Filipino contract labor, employing male workers in construction or menial services, workers who were vulnerable to unfair labor practices overseas.⁴³ The male migrant worker’s narratives of personal crisis in the Gulf attest to a severe undermining of his sense of manhood, already worn thin by the lack of employment at home, and stigmatized as an “unclean,” “contaminating,” “unruly carnality” in a racially hierarchized workplace privileging Euro-Americans and foreign Arabs.⁴⁴

Returned overseas workers did not speak often about what they had endured. In Cristy's company, Al's account of Saudi Arabia makes no mention of the strict regulatory practices he recounted to Gorio. Rather, Al depicts Saudi as a "lonely desert" watched over by the same night sky he remembers from the Buendia of his childhood. That Al's account of working in the Gulf should differ so dramatically across gender lines typifies the silence of returned male migrant workers regarding their dehumanizing experiences abroad, an understandable attempt to preserve their cultural cachet, their community's high estimation of overseas workers as well traveled and cosmopolitan.⁴⁵

When Auring, as a woman of the 1940s in the Philippines who has no conception of the Middle East, asks Al to describe it, he tells her that the desert is like a cemetery, its vastness a sublime closeness to death. His various evocations of Saudi Arabia—a (missed) opportunity for illicit sexual escapades with white women, a space for recollecting childhood, and a figurative proximity to the grave—underscore the film's espousal of a relational, rather than absolute, sense of place.

Yet this relational sense of place and its corollary, spatial transience, is best disclosed by the revenant Auring. A beautiful female apparition dressed in white, Auring is kin to the "white lady" of Tagalog urban legend, a seducer of men whose ruined mansion appears, to spellbound eyes, in all its former magnificence. But the motifs of seduction and a spectral forest residence in *Haplos* point to another set of folkloric beliefs, those concerning the *ingkanto*—from *encanto*, the Spanish word for enchantment—*spirits of a place* whose "characteristics are related to their locale." *Inkanto* narratives typically involve an encounter with a beautiful stranger due to the trespass of some territorial taboo: the enchantress's victim "disappears into the forest" and beholds her splendid home where others perceive only wreckage. The *ingkanto* experience does not usually provoke the "drama of disbelief" (a hesitation as to its veracity), which for Tzvetan Todorov characterizes the modern fantastic. Scholars of Filipino folklore remind us that "encounters with spirits are not themselves considered abnormal"; though some urbanites might respond to *ingkanto* accounts with concerned incredulity, "as a rule, supernatural encounters are not viewed as pathological" unless the seduced mortal chooses to "remain in the spirit world."⁴⁶ The anxiety

provoked by this supernatural encounter is, then, not equivalent to literary critic Todorov's notion of hesitation between belief and disbelief as the defining response to a fantastic event.⁴⁷ Todorov's description of the fantastic in Western literature, which understands the supernatural as a problem for a disenchanted present, is not appropriate for Buendia's experience of ghosts because for the townspeople time is neither fully secularized nor rationalized. In *Haplos's* *ingkanto* experience, the crucial question is not whether one ought to believe in the existence of ghosts; rather, the question concerns the dangers of being taken in by a phantom courtship.⁴⁸ When Ilyong and Cristy intervene it is not to doubt what Al has seen but rather to caution against choosing death over life, one world and time over another, however captivating these alternatives might be.

Auring's terror of the chaotic times (*magulong panahon*) in which she lived (in the forties), and her vain hopes of escaping danger through love, segue into the townspeople's perception of their own tumultuous circumstances (in the eighties). This analogy between two historical moments marked by guerrilla conflict is effected by the phantom's vivid memories, so that the present's ability to remind us of the past attains a profound resonance, ultimately destabilizing the borders between past and present by showing them to be porous. Hearing gunfire and voices in the dense foliage, Auring thinks they are caused by the clash of the Japanese Imperial Army and the Hukbalahap (Huks [Hukbo ng Bayan Laban Sa Hapon], or People's Anti-Japanese Army). Al and the others, though, assume that it is an exchange between the Communist guerrillas (the New People's Army, or NPA) and the PC. Although this parallelism and continuity between the two conflicts is encouraged by the film's metaphor of palimpsest—of one set of events being written on another, with both inscriptions legible—it is important not to overlook the profound ambivalence at work in this dissonant evocation of time and place.

The Huks, a resistance army, were organized by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in 1941–1942 to oppose the Japanese Imperial Army. The CPP, intent on harnessing broad support, adopted united front tactics and played down its role in the Huks so as not to alienate non-Communist sympathizers.⁴⁹ The Huks were involved in a queasy alliance with the American military in retreat (the United States Armed Forces in the Far East, or

USAFFE, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur), because the Japanese colonizers were a threat to both Filipino nationalist and American colonial interests. Though the returning USAFFE troops and the Huks fought side by side to end Japanese occupation in 1944–1945, in the final months of liberation the USAFFE as well as Filipino landlords and elite turned against the Huks. Once heralded as heroes of the resistance, the Huks became stigmatized as Communists and bandits and were attacked by American troops and government forces. In the postwar period, the guerrilla army became an insurgency army, a peasant rebellion.⁵⁰

These continuities between the anti-Japanese guerrillas and modern-day Communist forces (NPAs) are prominent in *Haplos*. The use of the term *hapon* in *Haplos* has a double signification: it is the Filipino word for Japanese and also a code word among NPA guerrillas for Philippine government troops.⁵¹ The two conflicts then—between Japanese soldiers and resistance fighters in the 1940s and clashes between the NPA and the PC in the 1980s—are linked by a historically motivated linguistic slippage (*hapon* can stand for both the foreign colonizers and the national constabulary). The linguistic transposition surrounding *hapon* signals the way in which a foreign race and nationality (the Japanese, here essentialized by means of racism as imperialist) becomes collapsed onto the current opponents of the NPA.

Historical parallels in *Haplos* are conspicuous and insightful, and certainly the ghost narrative, by giving a doubled, dislocated vision of two moments, provides access to the prior conflict (the Huks' campaign in World War II) through the lens of the current one (the clash of military and Communist rebels). Yet the film complicates this surface analogy; strict binary correspondences between past and present are difficult to sustain. Although the Japanese Imperial Army is always cast in a negative light due to the viewers' sympathy with Auring, the narrative is much more ambivalent about taking sides in the 1980s conflict—the townspeople are clearly divided on this matter. The film betrays a profound ambivalence regarding the question of who is to be feared in the forest (ghosts? Japanese soldiers? the NPA? the military?), an ambivalence that arises narratively from the ghost film's invocation of various battles on the same contested terrain.

Haplos's screenwriter has remarked that the ending, in which Cristy takes on Auring's characteristics in the ghost's absence, is really meant to underscore the film's theme of "transience—what is there and what is not there." In the last scene, ghostly possession allows the female protagonists to converge, so that both are visible while simultaneously being occluded, epitomizing the out-of-place (*wala sa lugar*) character of Buendia itself. For Lee, the town raises the same questions that the ghostly women do: Have old things passed away in the town, or do they remain? Do things long dead persist among the living?⁵²

Allegorical palimpsest, or multiple spatiotemporal inscriptions, are nowhere more apparent than in the film's frenetic climax, as the characters converge on the forest scene of the central traumatic event. The sequence begins with Al's inability to choose between Auring and Cristy, which causes the heartbroken ghost to run, sobbing, into the forest. But other ghosts await her: the Japanese soldiers of another time set upon her, and Al, arriving unarmed and too late, helplessly witnesses Auring's traumatic reliving of her sexual violation and death. By parallel editing, Auring's flight into the forest and her demise are rhymed fourfold: by Al's pursuit of Cristy; by Cristy's pursuit of Al; by Ilyong's failed attempt to rewrite events by rescuing Auring from the Japanese soldiers; and, at the furthest remove, by the townsfolk who follow Cristy into the forest to protect her from Communist rebels—Cristy's mother, the priest, and the Philippine Constabulary. As the film compellingly demonstrates, all the key players in the narrative head for the "same" place at the "same" time, but their experiences of events in the forest are discrepant and incommensurable, animated by different motives rooted in different worlds and times. Parallel editing conveys a cinematic "meanwhile" in which everyone is shown "simultaneously" running toward the forest, yet this chronological simultaneity is fractured by intractable noncontemporaneity, as the characters' discrepant experiences of that disjointed moment in the forest (so that some see wartime ghosts and others see Communist insurgents) force the insight of nonsynchronous, dislocated times and spaces. Parallel editing here is so effective because, in the cinema, editing is equivalent to tense in verbal language. A consideration of tense and time in the ghost film can begin with Gerard Genette's idea of tense

as composed of order (sequence of events), duration (length of events), and frequency (singular or iterative mention of events) in the time of the narrative discourse as compared to the temporality of the story told. In film studies, Genette's postulates concerning narrative have been applied by Tom Gunning to an analysis of what the latter calls the "narrator system" of the classical Hollywood text.⁵³ The emphasis Genette and Roland Barthes place on temporality and spatial orientation in the linear trajectory of narrative discourse and diegesis corresponds in Tom Gunning's schema to editing, which he defines as the filmic equivalent of tense in verbal language, while focalization (the perspective that orients the narration) translates as point-of-view editing. In the scene of Auring's forest violation, both tense (as parallel editing) and focalization (as point-of-view editing) combine to show that Auring's "past" is being lived nonsynchronously as Al's "present"—both of them "see" the Japanese soldiers, and in the "meanwhile," montage gives us the other "present(s)" of the government troops rushing into the forest.

The spectral restaging of Auring's violation and death is the most arresting moment of *Haplos* because it can evoke a split experience of temporality on the part of the spectator. Because the film's graphic retelling of already accomplished events proceeds as an unfolding in the viewer's present, the knowledge that a tragedy has already come to pass is combined with the urgent feeling that the past has yet to happen. Roland Barthes calls this feeling a "vertigo of time defeated," an uncanny and conflicted sense of temporality generated by old photographs of people once alive, but who are now "alive" only in the photos, prompting us to "shudder . . . over a catastrophe which has already occurred"; we feel, with a pang, that the dead have yet to die.⁵⁴

This multiple, self-contradictory experience of time on the part of the spectator is due to the ghost film's ability to stage the vivid return of past events. Watching with dread as the soldiers lay hands on Auring, the viewer experiences as an impending tragedy a violation that has already happened. This temporal disorientation in *Haplos* is the crux of the ghost's multiple invocation of time: what returns does so as both "repetition *and* first time."⁵⁵ In contrast to the rote recital by which historicism "tell[s] the sequence of events like beads in a rosary,"⁵⁶ ghostly temporality's retelling of historical

injustice retains the power to outrage, the inordinate singularity of a first time.

The translation of the film's title, "touch" or "caress," pertains to ordinary people who have a brush with a local spirit and grow sensitized to the split but mutually articulated times and places of Buendia itself: past and present, forest and town, local and global. Auring's house at the opening of the forest, which the contemporary lovers enter only to emerge transformed, is a potent figure for standing on the threshold of remembrance, of awakening to the contestations of history.

Rouge: The Spectral Courtesan

Rouge tells the story of Fleur (in pinyin, "Ruhua"), the ghost of a courtesan who died in a suicide pact with her lover in 1934. Having waited fifty-three years for her lover in the underworld to no avail, she resurfaces among the living to find him. When she first discloses her identity to a journalist, Yuan Yongding, he responds with terror and confusion. "I failed history at school," he confesses, and begs to be left alone. The claim to have failed one's own history through forgetfulness or lack of familiarity is the journalist's first response to the demands of the ghost of the past.

Yongding and his girlfriend, Ling Chujuan, also a journalist, resolve to assist Fleur. Learning that Fleur's cowardly lover did not fulfill his end of their suicide pact, they attempt to locate him by orchestrating a reunion for the long separated couple. As the reporters grow more and more captivated by the ghostly Fleur, touched by her anachronistic, coquettish grace, Chujuan's initial suspicion that the ghost might pose a threat to her relationship with Yongding subsides. Yet there is a love triangle in *Rouge*: both Chujuan and Yongding become smitten with the ghost (fig. 4).⁵⁷ This, of course, in subdued form, resembles *Haplos*'s uncanny ménage à trois; in that film, as in *Rouge*, the mortal female becoming enamored with the antiquated woman's idealized but confining femininity underscores the sometimes troubling sexual politics of nostalgia.

Even more than in *Haplos*, focalization through the ghost in *Rouge* is focused on delineating Fleur's perspective on her own story and on the city of Hong Kong. The film not only gives us flashbacks in which the past, rendered



Figure 4 The love triangle in *Rouge*: Both journalists become smitten with the ghost.

in red and golden tones, looks far more enchanting than the present, almost always filmed in clinical blues and whites; it frequently gives us, through point-of-view editing, shot–reaction shot compositions that traverse space and time. In an editing strategy that recurs throughout the film, we see a shot of the journalist and Fleur looking at the cityscape; we cut from a close-up of Fleur’s wistful face to a point-of-view shot, a shot taken in the position from which Fleur is looking, of the facade of an establishment from 1930s Hong Kong; this image fades to black, and then there is a reaction shot of Fleur’s melancholy face; and finally, a shot of the contemporary building that has replaced the place Fleur remembers (fig. 5).

This complements the other cinematic device for figuring recollection in *Rouge*, that of careful superimposition of memory-images of the Cantonese opera upon a shop window. Instead of bracketing these sequences as flashbacks, the techniques of point-of-view editing, fades between shots, and superimposition do not give us the sense of a cut or a disjunction be-



Figure 5 Shot–reaction shots articulate nonsynchronous time. Point-of-view editing prefigures recollection with a shot of Fleur’s wistful face.

tween memory and the present. Rather, these devices layer shot sequences, effectively blurring distinctions between recollection and perception, allowing past and present to cohabitate in one gaze. This is cinema’s answer to historical nonsynchronism.

This nostalgic enchantment with Fleur infuses the film with a sentimental longing for the brothel as a privileged place for love in courtesan culture.⁵⁸ In counterpoint to the casual pragmatism informing the journalists’ relationship are Fleur’s glamorous affair with Twelfth Master in the 1930s and the film’s implicit celebration of her economic and sexual power over her clients. This upholds courtesan culture as a privileged social space, a meeting ground for men and women where desires could be acted out and affections formed between partners of equal talent, allowing women a relatively greater degree of autonomy in love as opposed to the strict confines of an arranged marriage.



Figure 6 Nostalgia and the spectacularizing of cultural difference is evident in *Haplos*'s wistful portrait of the ghost's colonial-era lifestyle. Courtesy Ricardo Lee

Yet, as we saw in *Haplos*, this nostalgia for anachronistic, spectral women, despite its capacity to provoke a radicalized, nonsynchronous conception of history, is not without its disturbing aspects. In a different but suggestively analogous context, one critic notes that nostalgia became ubiquitous in mainland Chinese cities of the 1990s when the Chinese, “who could hardly wait to burst through gateway 2000, [were] suddenly seized by a nostalgic languor,” deliberately fashioning themselves into a “mesmerizing mirror of the West while at the same time relentlessly fabricating Oriental mythology in front of this magical mirror.”⁵⁹ This evocative mirror metaphor is reminiscent of both *Rouge* and *Haplos*, in which a community caught up in the successful mirroring of global hegemonic culture feels the need to forge its own nostalgically pictured spectacle of (what is felt to be a diminishing) cultural difference. This spectacularizing of cultural difference is visible in the longing backward look at Cantonese opera performances and Fleur's coy glamour in *Rouge*, and in the wistful portrait of the ghost's decorous lifestyle that reflects Spanish colonial influences in *Haplos* (fig. 6). This staging of past cultural difference is personified in both films through the “traditional femininity” of women.

Rouge's anachronistic ghost-heroine and her fantastic transgression of limits (time, logical categories, and mortality) have been read as a figuration of collective anxieties over the 1997 handover of Hong Kong. Fleur as ghost enables the meeting of two moments (Hong Kong in the 1930s and 1980s) and embodies the postcolonial city's vexed positioning "between two colonizers," in Rey Chow's apt phrase.⁶⁰ Scholars of the New Hong Kong Cinema put *Rouge* in the context of a cinema of "wandering spooks," in which elegiac or ghostly elements betray a preoccupation with a vanishing history—a cultural identity specific to pre-1997 Hong Kong—which these films inscribe in response to fears that the handover from Britain to Mainland China augurs the disappearance of that identity.⁶¹ As 1997 drew near, this allegorical language of history as a specter—and of Hong Kong denizens themselves as ghosts "crossing over" between the boundaries of the living and the dead or, figuratively speaking, Chinese tradition and Western modernity—attained the status of a critical commonplace. Fleur, the "abandoned harlot" who has a "missed encounter" with her past, was seen as personifying Hong Kong's own historical trajectory (its future "reunion" with its past roots in China) as well as its cultural hybridity (an amalgam of Chinese and British elements).⁶²

Rouge makes special demands on an audience; its allusive resonance is best appreciated by viewers who recognize that this nostalgic allegory of Hong Kong's conflicted, hybridized cultural identity in the late 1980s takes as its vehicle a protagonist who is three things at once: specter, prostitute, and woman. Fleur is not just a prostitute lost in time; she is also a ghost-courtesan who hails from the pleasure houses of what the film nostalgically envisions as a more romantic, gracious age. These three aspects of Fleur coalesce so powerfully in *Rouge's* evocation of cultural and historical loss because the film deftly alludes to older Chinese intertexts around ghost and courtesan as deeply symbolic feminine figures. As Chow astutely remarks, *Rouge* is rife with allusion to traditional scholar-courtesan romances. In Fleur's first meeting with Twelfth Master (fig. 7), she sings a song familiar to Cantonese audiences, "A melancholy autumn away from home" ["Ke tu qui hen"]:

The words of "Ke tu qui hen" tell of the love of a scholar and a courtesan-songstress. . . . For audiences who do not recognize the tune, this opening scene is by itself a beautiful capturing of the elusive romantic encounter of



Figure 7 Allusions to scholar-courtesan romances in *Rouge*

a prostitute and a dandy; but for those who do, the preordained *and thus* nostalgic nature of the encounter is remarkable. This encounter signifies how the “spontaneous” love between Ruhua and Shier Shao [Twelfth Master]—the “original” story from the 1930s—is itself already a modern (re)enactment, a nostalgic (re)play of older tales, legends, and romances.⁶³

That a viewer who recognizes the tune can perceive several encounters where others see only one confirms that allegory is quintessentially a hieroglyph, a public secret that proffers its meaning with seemingly open hands (hence its general comprehensibility on some levels), while other semantic strata are available only to those privy to its system of encryption.⁶⁴ This makes allegory an especially rich vehicle for culturally specific expression, because its coded references on the secondary level are utilized to selectively constitute and address a particular audience.

For an audience of cultural insiders able to see beyond what meets the eye, Fleur recalls and revises two figures from traditional Chinese ghost literature: the “avenging ghost,” a “perturbed spirit” who aims to redress a grievance inflicted by someone she trusted; and the “amorous ghost,” who seeks to overcome the “impeded path of love” by rejoining a lost lover.⁶⁵ That the ghostly Fleur should arouse sympathy rather than horror might have something to do with the film’s similarity to late imperial ghost literature, in which the allure of ghostly women corresponds to “the widespread fascination with the death of beautiful, talented women in the sentimental culture of th[e] period.”⁶⁶ In classical Chinese literature, the female specter merely underscores an existing affinity between ghosts and the feminine: positioned as pure yin in relation to “man as the fullest flowering of yang,” the ghost is a foil to human, as woman is to man. The female ghost thus incarnates the perceived resemblance between ghostliness and femininity⁶⁷ and (regrettably) affirms the corollary that maleness is equivalent to humanity.

The figure of the ghost courtesan is not unusual in the classical Chinese discourses of the strange (*zhiguai*) and marvelous (*chuanqi*); indeed, the sentimental fascination with the death of talented women segues easily into late imperial literature’s nostalgia for the courtesan, an alluring woman of great talent whose passing reminded Ming and Qing literati of the lost splendor of an earlier age.⁶⁸ Since the mid-nineteenth century, the late Ming courtesan was collocated with the “sense of an ending,” be it “personal loss, the end of a dynasty, [or] the destruction of a culture.”⁶⁹

Rouge’s historical allegory is focalized through a woman who is both ghost and courtesan, two intensely feminized positions. In this the film is like a long tradition in Chinese literature of seeing ghostly return, or a courtesan’s decline, as a sentimental allegory of the passing of an era. For an audience alert to the allusions of this ghost allegory, then, Fleur is deeply coded by literary tradition as a profoundly eloquent figure for history. The spectral female courtesan’s capacity to evoke the sense of an ending (though as a revenant she also evokes a sense of perpetuity) is exploited to intense effect in *Rouge*, grafting the phantom’s literary antecedents to New Hong Kong Cinema’s concerns over the impending return to Mainland China. Ghostly temporality, already heavy with references to more times than one, is thus powerfully combined with Chinese classical literature’s affective structures

for contemplating the passing of an age through the figure of a courtesan-specter.

When the two journalists in *Rouge* rummage through antiques stores for news of events that transpired half a century ago, they do so not only because Fleur is tangled up with the tabloid gossip of the 1930s, but also because they find that they have a stake in “old news,” too. In this scene at the antiques shop, the student who claims to have “failed” history reclaims it as his own. At first, Fleur’s commitment to holding her lover to his original promise puzzles the two journalists, who chide her about her obsession with failed promises of the past. Yet as the story unfolds, Fleur’s obsession with finding her lover becomes a catalyst for the other characters and the spectator to reflect on the idea that possesses Fleur—the question of the past’s claims upon the present, of whether history can be addressed/redressed, or whether, as Fleur’s missed encounters suggest, it is ever entirely eclipsed.

Allegory as redemption of a vanishing past is evident in *Rouge* and *Haplos* inasmuch as both love stories encourage us to see a foregrounded encounter filtered through occluded events so that we perceive the echoes of “old” romances in “new” ones. Yet this is not the only level allegory has articulated. In *Haplos*, the skirmishes in the forest and the townspeople’s chancing upon a local spirit caution against a nation’s propensity toward historical amnesia. The same is true for *Rouge*, in which the journalists first come to terms with having failed history, and later, with empathy and compassion, renew their historical consciousness in a profoundly meaningful way. In both films, the modern couples’ nostalgic romance with old-fashioned ghosts confiscates the conventional motif of the love triangle and reinscribes it with the vicissitudes of sexual-historical entanglements. Indeed, several scenes in both *Haplos* and *Rouge*—the forest denouement, Fleur and Twelfth Master’s duet—exemplify allegory’s capacity to “condense” the palimpsest of disparate incidents so that a “vertical reading of allegorical correspondences” comes sharply into view.⁷⁰

Spectral Justice

The spectral heroines of *Haplos* and *Rouge* direct our gaze, not only to our accountability to the nearly forgotten past, but also to its unrealized vision

of the future. The motif of the broken promise, as instantiated by Fleur's attempt to hold her forgetful lover to his word, speaks of the present's failure to fulfill the expectations of the past, while Auring's tragic romance with Al reminds us that past wrongs have yet to be redressed in the future, as ongoing controversies concerning comfort women and overseas Filipino workers since the late 1990s attest.⁷¹

The ghost calls us to a radicalized conception of historical justice. Derrida defines justice as being accountable to ghosts, to those who are no longer with us yet still are. He writes:

It is necessary to speak *of the* ghost, indeed *to the* ghost and *with* it. . . . No justice . . . seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence. . . . Without *this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question, "where?" "where tomorrow?" "whither?"⁷²

Here Derrida asserts that the capacity to be with specters is at the core of ethical politics. Historical accountability is a matter of being responsible not merely to the past, but rather to noncontemporaneity, to the ghosts who perturb the present with their simultaneous presence and absence, making a simple fenced-in present impossible.

This ethics of historical accountability recalls Benjamin's "now-time" (*jetztzeit*), a shock that bursts open the homogeneity of a historicist conception of time. Now-time is an "emphatic renewal" of a consciousness that sees the possibilities inherent in every moment (the messianic), espousing a "radical orientation toward the past." Benjamin is arguing against modernity's complacency toward the past, that is, the way that a "future-oriented" present understands the past only insofar as it serves the aims of the future. Conversely, only a remembering of a "suppressed" and "oppressed past" can radicalize our orientation toward the future. Whereas the idea of progress

had “close[d] off the future as a *source* of disruption with the aid of teleological constructions of history,” the orientation to the past that Benjamin argues for is not oriented toward confirming the ways in which the future has fulfilled its promise to the past; rather, he bids us remember the ways it has precisely failed to do so.⁷³ This renewed historical consciousness is awake to the future’s betrayal of its promises to the past—in neglecting to address its injustices and in failing to fulfill its horizon of expectations. Benjamin thus calls us to distance ourselves from our apprehensions of our own future in order to take stock of the past’s “unfulfilled future.” Habermas elaborates: “To all past epochs [Benjamin] ascribes a horizon of unfulfilled expectations, and to the future-oriented present he assigns the task of experiencing a corresponding past through remembering, in such a way that we can fulfill its expectations with our weak messianic power.”⁷⁴

Thus, in opposition to the conventional modern view that the present’s expectations of the future determine its appropriation of the past, Benjamin advocates a reversal of conventional historical consciousness, so that the past is not merely appropriated for the interests of the future; instead, the past’s horizon of expectation is one to which our present and our future are acutely responsible. He says, “Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.” Seen in this light, haunting as a recognition of commonalities between those who are and those who are no longer “blast[s] . . . a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history.”⁷⁵ Benjamin importunes us “to fight on behalf of previous generations, the dead . . . [for] if this struggle fails, the dead may be said to die a second death.”⁷⁶ In this call to accountability, Derrida’s disjointed time with specters and Benjamin’s now-time, mindful of the dead, coincide. In the nostalgic allegory of ghost films such as *Rouge* and *Haplos*, spatiotemporal nonsynchronism undermines modernity’s homogeneous time, fomenting instead a radicalized accountability to those who are no longer with us, a solidarity with specters made possible by remembering.

Notes

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- 1 Disbelief is the typical problem that ghosts and fantastic discourse, more generally, are thought to present. Margaret L. Carter writes: “The modern ghost story is addressed to a reader skeptical about ghosts”; in “Gothic romances of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” characters “tend to be preoccupied with questioning the ontological status of their ‘supernatural’ experiences.” This is in keeping with Tzvetan Todorov’s pioneering study of the fantastic as a hesitation or drama of disbelief between the marvelous (supernaturalism) and the uncanny (scientific rationalism). I do not discount that incredulity is in some cultural contexts an important element in the reception of ghosts, but in this essay I am more interested in a thornier and less often pursued issue in regard to ghosts and the fantastic—the problem they pose to the modern concept of time. See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25. See also Margaret L. Carter, *Specter or Delusion? The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), 1, 6–7.
- 2 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Time of History and the Times of the Gods,” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 36. Chakrabarty’s critique of empty, homogeneous time seems indebted to the work of Walter Benjamin, who wrote, “The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself.” Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 261.
- 3 “The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. . . . Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply. Historical materialists are aware of that.” Benjamin, “Theses,” 254.

- 4 Jacques Derrida writes, "Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. What is a ghost? . . . Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time makes of it also a last time" (*Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf [New York: Routledge, 1994], 10).
- 5 For Ackbar Abbas, Hong Kong is a space marked by "a weakening of the sense of chronology, of historical sequentiality, so that old and new are easily contemporaneous and continuities and discontinuities exist side by side . . . [in a] kind of spatial palimpsest." See Ackbar Abbas, "Building on Disappearance," *Public Culture* 6, no. 3 (spring 1994): 448.
- 6 Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (spring 1980): 68–69.
- 7 Abbas, "Building on Disappearance," 452.
- 8 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), 177–179.
- 9 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 29–30. For Benjamin's views on allegory's temporality, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 165–168.
- 10 The term was coined by Alsatian Johannes Hofer in a medical thesis written in 1688. See Suzanne Vromen, "The Ambiguity of Nostalgia," *Vivo Annual* 21 (1993): 70–71.
- 11 Jonathan Steinwand, "The Future of Nostalgia in Friedrich Schlegel's Gender Theory: Casting German Aesthetics beyond Ancient Greece and Modern Europe," in *Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism*, ed. Jean Pickering and Suzanne Kehde (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 9–10.
- 12 In *Haplos* and *Rouge* nostalgia applies to periods so remote that neither the human protagonists nor the majority of the films' audience members have lived through them. This resembles what Arjun Appadurai calls "imagined nostalgia," "forms of mass advertising [that] teach consumers to miss things they have never lost," thus generating "nostalgia for things that never were." I would argue, though, that while the success of either of these films might be indebted to some degree to the pervasiveness of nostalgia as a merchandising ploy that has conditioned audience responses, in *Rouge* and *Haplos* a redemptive kind of "imagined nostalgia" holds out the possibility of a radicalized historical consciousness that recognizes a past on the brink of oblivion. See Arjun Appadurai, "Consumption, Duration, and History," in *Streams of Cultural Capital: Transnational Cultural Studies*, ed. David Palumbo-Liu and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 36.
- 13 Benjamin, "Theses," 261.
- 14 In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* Benjamin writes that the distance requisite for allegory is death, which might explain why ghosts are so rife with allegorical significance. For elaboration on Benjamin's notion of the relationship between allegory and death, see Buck-Morss,

Dialectics, 161, and Samuel Weber, "Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth, and Allegory in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*," *MLN* 106, no. 3 (April 1991): 496–497.

15 Chakrabarty, "Time of History," 48–50.

16 *Ibid.*, 36–37.

17 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 2.

18 *Ibid.*, 6–7.

19 Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics," in *New German Critique* 11 (spring 1977): 27–33.

20 See Chakrabarty, "Time of History," 48–50. In a similar vein, Chakrabarty has demonstrated that the concept of the "contemporary," which proceeds from nonsynchronism, crucially underpins historical "evolutionism" and "modernist elitism." In modernity's conception of time, the multiplicity of times and worlds that nonsynchronism suggests is instead enlisted toward uniformity, to a valorizing of some elements of society as being more "contemporary" or correctly forward-looking than others. Chakrabarty argues that, far from troubling modern time consciousness with a radical plurality, nonsynchronism has been reduced to a distinction between those who are backward/conservative and those who are truly contemporary/progressive/advanced.

21 Reinhart Koselleck, "'Neuzeit': Remarks on the Semantics of the Modern Concepts of Movement," in *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979), 247–249, 256.

22 See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 97. On spirit photography, cinema, and specters, see Terry Castle, "Phantasmagoria: Spectral Technology and the Metaphysics of Modern Reverie," *Critical Inquiry*, 15, no. 1 (autumn 1988): 26–61; Tom Gunning, "Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny," in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 42–71; Gunning, "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin, and *Traffic in Souls* (1913)," *Wide Angle* 19, no. 4 (October 1997): 25–61; and Allen W. Grove, "Röntgen's Ghosts: Photography, X-Rays, and the Victorian Imagination," *Literature and Medicine* 16, no. 2 (fall 1997): 141–173.

23 Grove, "Röntgen's Ghosts," 141.

24 Enrique Dussel writes: "Two opposing paradigms, the Eurocentric and the planetary, characterize the question of modernity. The first, from a Eurocentric horizon, formulates the phenomenon of modernity as exclusively European, developing in the Middle Ages and later on diffusing itself throughout the entire world. . . . According to this paradigm, Europe had exceptional internal characteristics that allowed it to supersede, through its rationality, all other cultures. . . . The chronology of this position has its geopolitics: modern subjectivity develops spatially, according to the Eurocentric paradigm, from the Italy of the Renaissance to

the Germany of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, to the France of the French Revolution; throughout, Europe is central. . . . [This] is an ideological and deforming organization of history; it has already created ethical problems with respect to other cultures. . . .

“The second paradigm, from a planetary horizon, conceptualizes modernity as the culture of the center of the ‘world-system,’ of the first world-system, through the incorporation of Amerindia, and as a result of the management of this ‘centrality.’ In other words, European modernity is not an independent, autopoietic, self-referential system, but instead is part of a world-system: in fact, its center. Modernity, then, is planetary. It begins with the simultaneous constitution of Spain with reference to its ‘periphery’ (first of all, properly speaking, Amerindia: the Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru). Simultaneously, Europe . . . will go on to constitute itself as center (as a super-hegemonic power that from Spain passes to Holland, England, and France over a growing periphery). . . . Modernity, then, in this planetary paradigm is a phenomenon proper to the system ‘center-periphery.’ Modernity is not a phenomenon of Europe as an independent system, but of Europe as center. . . .

“The centrality of Europe in the world-system is not the sole fruit of an internal superiority accumulated during the European Middle Ages over against other cultures. Instead, it is also the fundamental effect of the simple fact of the discovery, conquest, colonization, and integration (subsumption) of Amerindia. This simple fact will give Europe the determining comparative advantage over the Ottoman-Muslim world, India, and China. . . . The human experience of 4,500 years of political, economic, technological, and cultural relations of the interregional system will now be hegemonized by a Europe—which had never been the ‘center,’ and which, during its best times, became only a ‘periphery.’” Enrique Dussel, “Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998), 3–5.

25 Chakrabarty, “Time of History,” 55.

26 *Ibid.*, 51–52.

27 See Todorov, *Fantastic*; Andras Sandor, “Myths and the Fantastic,” *New Literary History* (1991): 339–358; Elaine L. Kleiner, “Mircea Eliade’s Theory of the Fantastic,” *Visions of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Fifteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. Allienne R. Becker (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 13–18; and Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny (1919),” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey in collaboration with Anna Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 219–252.

28 Roger Caillois, “Analyse du fantastique,” *Nef* 19 (1958), qtd. and trans. in Amy J. Ransom, *The Feminine As Fantastic in the Conte fantastique: Visions of the Other* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 10. Todorov’s oft-cited formulation of the fantastic is much indebted to Caillois. For Todorov, the fantastic appears in the instant when one nearly believes, but does not fully believe; when one nearly rejects, without entirely dismissing, that event which scandalizes

one's frames of reference. In his view, hesitation lies at the core of the fantastic: "I nearly reached the point of believing': that is the formula which sums up the spirit of the fantastic. Either total faith or total incredulity would lead us beyond the fantastic: it is hesitation which sustains its life." Todorov, *Fantastic*, 31. On the fantastic as eruption in rather than substitution of a world, see Roger Caillois, "Au coeur du fantastique," *Cohérences aventureuses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), qtd. and trans. in Ransom, *Feminine As Fantastic*, 10. On the fantastic as an artistic antinomy, a paradoxical juxtaposition of different worlds, see Jose B. Monleon, *A Specter Is Haunting Europe: A Sociohistorical Approach to the Fantastic* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1990), 6.

- 29 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 111-112. See also Jameson, "Magical Narratives: Romance As Genre," *New Literary History* 7, no. 1 (1975): 141-142. For Jameson, magical narratives are a literary form in which "world in the technical sense of the transcendental horizon of my experience becomes precisely visible as something like an innerworldly object in its own right, taking on the shape of world in the popular sense of nature, landscape, and so forth." Jameson's remarks on magical narratives enable a productive consideration of the disjunctive worlds that collide in the fantastic narrative.
- 30 Derrida, 17-18.
- 31 *Ibid.*, xx.
- 32 As Jameson puts it, "All it [spectrality] says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us." Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's 'Specters of Marx'*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 38.
- 33 On death as the conferral of absolute meaning, see Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Observations on the Sequence Shot," *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 236-237, qtd. in Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 32. The apparition also calls to mind Benjamin's figurative argument that the *facies hippocratica* (the appearance of the human face in a deathly state) reveals the very countenance of history. Benjamin, *Origin*, 166.
- 34 Rey Chow writes that Fleur in *Rouge* espouses a "cyclical" view of time, in contrast to the contemporary journalists' "linear," "uni-directional," and "irreversible" view of time: "Ruhua alludes to her past and future as if the meaning of her life, rather than beginning and ending at any one point, was repeating and recurring continually. A feeling of cyclical time . . . in which the debts of the past may be paid in the present, and in which unfinished events of the present may be completed in the future, accompanies Ruhua's endeavor of returning from the dead." Conversely, the journalists are "bound to their time . . . acutely conscious of time as a limit." Rey Chow, "A Souvenir of Love," *Modern Chinese Literature* 7 (1993): 66.

- 35 Noel Vera, "Butch Perez: Portrait of the Director As a Perfect Gentleman," *Philippine Cinema in the '90s*, ed. Agustin L. Sotto (forthcoming).
- 36 Derrida writes: "A question of repetition: a specter is always a revenant. One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back." Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 11.
- 37 They are (in Al's wry phrase), or "balik-Buendia" (returned to Buendia, which is how a friend describes them, punning on *balikbayan*, or back to the homeland, a common term for returned Filipino expatriates). *Pagbabalik*, or return, which in *Haplos* is also used to describe the phantom Auring ("isang gabi, siya'y nagbalik"), is closely associated with the nearest rendering for *nostalgia* in Tagalog: *pag-asam* (longing), as in "pag-asam na makabalik sa sariling bayan" [the longing to return to one's homeland], Fr. Leo James English's example in his *English-Tagalog Dictionary* (1977).
- 38 I borrow this phrase from Dai Jinhua's characterization of nostalgia in a story by Wang Shuo. See Dai Jinhua, "Imagined Nostalgia," trans. Judy T. H. Chen, *boundary 2* 24, no. 3 (fall 1997): 145. Al and Cristy are similar but different: she is a Manila-educated leftist who is now implementing politically suspect government measures to regulate sexuality and population. Cristy's move from the student Left to population control work would have been seen by some Philippine leftists as suspect, since population control is considered to deflect an analysis of poverty onto state regulation of sexuality, blaming social inequities on numbers rather than the inequitable distribution of resources. On the other hand, Cristy's work could also be viewed as women-positive and subversive of the dictates of the Catholic church, which enjoined Filipino women against any birth control options other than structured abstinence. For his part, Al admits to being motivated only by personal economic gain, having left Buendia for better financial prospects in Saudi Arabia. Al is no political activist, but rather a returned overseas laborer. Al half-jokingly states that he is a believer in "brain drain" (the best minds of the Philippines leaving to work in other countries) and "Filipinos for export" (shorthand for the immensely profitable dollar remittances generated by overseas labor, at the cost of making Filipinos themselves an export commodity) as a form of population control. The point of Al's dark witticism is that economically motivated migration to other countries might be the most effective way of thinning the Philippine population.
- 39 Auring's anachronistic femininity and vulnerability are in stark contrast to Cristy's worldly female-empowered candor. Cristy's line of work, family planning through contraception, is a rational, secular attempt at a contained, controlled, and ordered entry into the future, quite the opposite of the historical perspective evoked by Auring.
- 40 An avuncular diminutive for Basilio.
- 41 Ricardo Lee, the script writer of *Haplos*, has remarked that the ending in which Cristy takes on Auring's persona is consistent with an earlier version of the script. In that version, Cristy is not a population commission worker but a young theater student, an actress for whom "there is no boundary between the imagination and physical reality," so that allowing Auring to inhabit her person was just an extension of what she was trained to do as an actress. Lee

originally envisioned a young actress, Amy Austria, for the role of Cristy. When Vilma Santos was cast instead, Cristy's character was rewritten for a somewhat older woman. Lee had also envisioned the ending as a ménage à trois in which Cristy and Al, who reconcile by making love, are joined by the ghost, but this ending was also rewritten in keeping with Vilma Santos's star persona. Ghost possession then, can be said to veil the overtly sexual intention of Lee's earlier draft. Ricardo Lee, interview by Joel David and Bliss Cua Lim, 12 September 1999.

- 42 All translations of Filipino dialogue into English are my own.
- 43 In later years, shifts in Filipino labor migration trends would see an increase in women overseas workers destined for employment in Hong Kong, Japan, and Singapore, while male migrant workers continued to seek work in the Middle East. In both cases, the Philippine government, which benefited crucially from the dollar remittances of Filipino labor-for-export, failed to systematically protect the rights of these vulnerable workers in foreign nations.
- 44 Filipino men in the company of women, whether Arab or Asian, were routinely stopped by police and asked to produce marriage licenses. Jane A. Margold, "Narratives of Masculinity and Transnational Migration: Filipino Workers in the Middle East," in *Bewitching Women, Pious Men: Gender and Body Politics in Southeast Asia*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Michael G. Peletz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 275-276, 284-288.
- 45 Margold writes: "In the Ilocos (and elsewhere in Southeast Asia), male status had long derived not from the sexual division of labor but from the cosmopolitan knowledge that men gleaned from their regional and international journeys. Remarkably, male migrants to the Middle East had hardly spoken publicly of their trips. Even wives were often surprised to hear the details that emerged during my interviews with the men . . . By remaining silent about the humiliations they had endured overseas, the men could trade upon the cultural notion that foreign travel had imbued them with new social and political skills" (*ibid.*, 292).
- 46 Herminia Meñez, "Mythology and the Ingkanto Syndrome (1978)," in *Explorations in Philippine Folklore* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1996), 65-66.
- 47 Todorov, *Fantastic*, 25. Some secondary characters in *Haplos* do exhibit a rational skepticism over the hauntings: the liberal, materialist parish priest, for example, dismisses ghostly return as scientifically impossible and explains Al's breakdown as a form of culture shock at returning home.
- 48 In the contest of wills with an ingkanto, it is thought that if the mortal succumbs to the spirit's seduction, his consciousness becomes captive (*nabihag na dungan*), and he is lost to the human realm. The process of healing the victim and rescuing him from the grip of the specter involves delivering his consciousness from this otherworldly control, and propitiating the spirit for the welfare of the victim. See Meñez, "Mythology," 66, 71-72.
- 49 Alfredo B. Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines: An Introduction* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990), 29-31.

- 50 Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1979), 61-118.
- 51 I am indebted to Joel David for pointing out the resonances of the term *hapon*.
- 52 Lee, interview. The script for *Haplos* was one of four Lee-authored prize winners in the first ECP scriptwriting contest in 1981 (along with *Himala* [Miracle], *Bulag* [Blind], and *Bukas May Pangarap* [Tomorrow there is hope]). *Himala* (directed by Ishmael Bernal, 1982) was produced by the ECP while *Haplos* garnered partial funding. For an account of cultural policy in the ECP, see Joel David, "A Cultural Policy Experience in Philippine Cinema," in *Wages of Cinema: Film in Philippine Perspective* (Diliman, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1998), 48-61.
- 53 See Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980); Tom Gunning, "Theory and History: Narrative Discourse in the Narrator System," in *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 10-30; Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).
- 54 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96-97.
- 55 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10.
- 56 Benjamin, "Theses," 263.
- 57 Indeed, in her textured reading of the film, Chow points out that *Rouge* is "not only the story of a ghost talking nostalgically about a past romance, but is itself a romance with Ruhua, a romance that is nostalgic for superhuman lovers like her." My thoughts on the film are greatly indebted to Chow's discussion of the film and the novella on which it was based, *Yanzhi kou*, by Li Bihua. Chow has pointed out that the romance at the heart of *Rouge* is very much in keeping with the plot of early-twentieth-century Mandarin Duck and Butterfly novels (*Rouge* adopts the following conventions of the said novels: the love story between a courtesan and a well-bred young man, the faithfulness of the heroine, the tragic result). See Chow, "Souvenir," 65-67.
- 58 Ropp remarks the "uniqueness of the courtesan world as a meeting ground for men and women" in late imperial China, which, "in contrast to the rigid segregation of men and women in gentry society" opened a space for men and women to interact in a context where women were valued for their "comparable talents" and shared artistic and intellectual concerns with men. See Paul S. Ropp, "Ambiguous Images of Courtesan Culture in Late Imperial China," *Writing Women in Late Imperial China*, ed. Ellen Widmer and Kang-i Sun Chang (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 21.
- 59 Dai Jinhua, "Imagined Nostalgia," 145.
- 60 Rey Chow, "Between Colonizers: Hong Kong's Postcolonial Self-Writing in the 1990s," *Diaspora* 2, no. 2 (fall 1992): 151-170. In 1842, Hong Kong Island was relinquished by China to Great Britain, followed by the southern part of the Kowloon Peninsula and Stonecutters

Island in 1860. From 1898 to 1997, these and the New Territories were leased from China by Great Britain.

- 61 See Sek Kei, "The Wandering Spook," in *Phantoms of the Hong Kong Cinema*, program notes for the Thirteenth Hong Kong International Film Festival, 23 March–4 July 1987 (Hong Kong: The Urban Council), 13–16. Also see Esther C. M. Yau's brilliant reading of the recent handover and inherent latency and protracted nature of the historic event in her paper "The Full Emptiness of the Decolonization Event; Two Virtual Worlds in/of Hong Kong," presented at the Society for Cinema Studies Conference, 9–12 March 2000, Chicago.
- 62 David L. Eng, "Love at Last Site: Waiting for Oedipus in Stanley Kwan's *Rouge*," *Camera Obscura* 32 (September 1993–January 1994): 76, 94–95. Similarly, Abbas sees the ghost story deployed in *Rouge* as a narrative device that allows divergent times and spaces in Hong Kong's history to coalesce in a "historical montage." See Ackbar Abbas, "The New Hong Kong Cinema and the Deja Disparu," *Discourse* 16, no. 3 (spring 1994): 75.
- 63 Chow, "Souvenir," 71–72.
- 64 Benjamin, *Origin*, 174–175. On allegory as a public secret, see J. Hillis Miller, "The Two Allegories," in *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 356–357. In a similar vein, Angus Fletcher argues that the presence of allegory does not depend on whether or not every reader can recognize its double meaning: "The whole point of allegory is that it does not need to be read exegetically; it often has a literal level that makes good enough sense all by itself. But somehow this literal surface suggests a peculiar doubleness of intention. . . . We must avoid the notion that all people must see the double meaning for the work to be rightly called allegory. At least one branch of allegory, the ironic aenigma, serves political and social purposes by the very fact that a reigning authority (as in a police state) does not see the secondary meaning of the 'Aesop language.' But someone does see that meaning, and, once seen, it is felt strongly to be the final intention behind the primary meaning." Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1964), 7–8.
- 65 Anthony C. Yu, "'Rest, Rest, Perturbed Spirit!' Ghosts in Traditional Chinese Prose Fiction," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47, no. 2 (1987): 415–416, 423.
- 66 Judith T. Zeitlin cites *The Peony Pavilion or the Soul's Return* (1598) as emblematic of this trend. "Embodying the Disembodied: Representations of Ghosts and the Feminine," in Widmer and Chang, eds., *Writing Women*, 242.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 243–244.
- 68 Ropp, "Ambiguous Images," 25–31.
- 69 Wai-Yee Li, "The Late Ming Courtesan: Invention of a Cultural Ideal," in Widmer and Chang, *Writing Women*, 47.
- 70 Owens, "Allegorical Impulse," 76.

- 71 Auring's wartime violation in the forest recalls the victimization of "comfort women," native women who were systematically coerced into sexual servitude by Japanese soldiers in Southeast Asian countries in World War II. This issue reemerged explosively in the late 1990s as Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines demanded that Japan make reparations for these wartime atrocities against comfort women and correct distortions in Japanese schoolbook accounts of the Second World War. Similarly, Al's feminization as a migrant worker in the Gulf in the early 1980s foreshadows the subsequent economic and sexual abuse of Filipino female overseas contract workers in neighboring Asian countries whose numbers, in later years, would outpace those of male migrant workers when the Philippines became the second largest exporter of human labor in the world, and as Filipinos themselves became the nation's main export commodity. See Jorge V. Tigno, "Ties That Bind: The Past and Prospects of Philippine Labor Outmigration," *Pilipinas* 29 (fall 1997): 1–6.
- 72 Derrida, "Specters of Marx," xviii–xix.
- 73 Habermas, "Philosophical Discourse," 11–13. Ernst Bloch writes, "Now-time signifies a time when what is long past suddenly becomes a now. . . . What is long past touches itself in an odd, enveloping, circular motion. . . . In short: the continuum was exploded, so that the suddenly raw citation rises before our eyes." Ernst Bloch, "Recollections of Walter Benjamin," trans. Michael W. Jennings, in *On Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Recollections*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 342, qtd. in J. M. Fritzman, "The Future of Nostalgia and the Time of the Sublime," *Clio* 23, no. 2 (winter 1994): 170.
- 74 Habermas, "Philosophical Discourse," 13–16.
- 75 Benjamin, "Theses," 255, 263.
- 76 Fritzman, "Future of Nostalgia," 186. This is Fritzman's gloss on Benjamin's pronouncement, in "Theses" (260), that the working class must not "forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren."