CINE-DEMOGRAPHIES

CINE-DEMOGRAPHIES: POPULATION CRISIS IN LATE TWENTIETH

CENTURY FILM CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the significance of demographic discourses and epistemologies in the emergence of global film culture over the last three decades of the Twentieth Century. Adopting a materialist reading of Serge Daney's notion of a critical cine-demography, I explore three ways in which moments of population crisis over this period can be interpreted through film.

An experiment in method as much as an alternative periodizing account of late capitalist culture, I trace the evolution of a demographic imaginary through three, chronologically organized, case studies in the articulation of population crisis since the early 1970s: (1) the fear of overpopulation that reaches a frenzied pitch in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s; (2) anxiety about absolute population decline, situated in the context of Eastern Europe in the late 1990s; and (3) the emerging problem of population aging at the end of the century, centered in Western Europe, Japan and North America.

In each of these cases, I identify a corresponding archive of films that are marked at the level of their formal and narrative construction by the pressure of these demographic and discursive formations. In the first chapter, I read the emergent contradictions entailed in the globalization of population discourse through the lens of popular American science fiction films of the 1970s. In second chapter, my approach is adjusted to consider the way film style of regional movement, school or single director might be interpreted in terms of its response to local demographic conditions. Here, I look in particular at the development of an aesthetic of slowness in the films of Béla Tarr and how this feature of his mature film style can be interpreted through the population crisis attributed to a state of absolute demographic decline in post-socialist Eastern European nations. In the third chapter, I take up the expanded frame of a global cinema to position the equally, if uneven global process of the contemporary crisis discourse of population aging. My concluding statements return to the broader questions of method raised in my study.

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Introduction

Toward a Cinematic Demography of Late Capitalism

In a 1988 contribution to *Libération*, Serge Daney proposed that "the science that ought to be applied to cinema today is no longer psychoanalysis or semiotics but the study of movie-populations." "What's needed," Daney claimed, "is a demography of film beings." The argument that Daney outlines posits a fascinating reconception of the hermeneutics of cinema as a social form, built around the relation between a cinema population – which is to say the film-going audience – and a screen population – or the population of actors filling the projected image. The "cine-demography" that Daney broaches as a way of assessing the state of cinema at the twilight of the twentieth century conjugates these two populations along their halting, shifting, waxing and waning relation to each other over time. Inverting Cecil B. DeMille's dream that one day there would be as many people on the screen as were present in the bustling cinemas of the time, Daney argues that over the course of the mid-century it was in fact through a reversal of the trajectory of DeMille's ambition that the relationship of the twin populations of cinema seems to have developed. Thus, Daney writes,

> the history of cinema can very easily be told through this isomorphism of entrances (into the auditorium and into the frame). We know that from the middle of the century (post-war, television), fewer and fewer people in already too many movie theatres saw films with fewer and fewer people in them. This slimmed down spectacle has been called modern cinema. And the story of *L'Avventura* tells nothing else but this symptomatic minor event: from a small group of characters, one quite simply disappears. (Daney)

By the late 1980s, in the face of the unmistakable domination of home video, Daney's speculative historiography of film takes on the appearance of a new variation on the nostalgic yearning for the return of the crowds of cinema's heyday. Yet Daney's insistence that "[o]ne way or another, one must think big again" is aimed less at the decline of the screen population and more at the notion that epic "bigness," in some undetermined new form, might once again draw the cinema population back along with it. "One thing is certain," Daney writes, "we have left the era of modern cinema (from Rossellini to Godard) with the individual as its heroic hypothesis, the others as hell nearby and relations between humans as the only subject worth dealing with. But we haven't returned to the cluttered 'grand spectacle' of cinema at its origins" (ibid.) The "big" that Daney looks forward to is framed, against this cine-demographic history of film, as a sort of synthesis of formal tendencies, in which a film like Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (1987), despite its hundreds of extras, seems infused with an attention to visual detail and an intimacy in its exhibition of multitudes. What is most intriguing about Daney's observation, for me, is less its accuracy in forecasting the evolution of late twentieth and early twenty-first epic, which is unclear; rather, it is the expanded conception of a demography, one that encompasses both the sense of an enumeration of bodies as population and of a rendering, representation or monstration (*graphia*) of the people (*demos*).

To take these primary, etymological elements of the word demography seriously is to recognize the terrific semantic overdetermination hidden in a word that today is most commonly used to differentiate target audiences of a commodity, service or marketing

campaign. Attending to the *graphia* in demography, also uncovers the deeply embedded aesthetic dimension of the term and the practices it names. Appearing for the first time in the title of Achille Guillard's 1855 study, *Élements de statistique humaine ou demographie comparée*, demography broadly denotes a historical shift in statistical thought and practice. Specifically, it can be said to name a practice of comparative analysis of statistical regularities within populations that is distinguishable from a prior, purely enumerative function of statistics *vis à vis* the population of a state. The *concept* of demography, understood in this historically specific sense, exists *avant la lettre* and can be traced back at least to John Graunt's 1662 essay "Natural and Political Observations made upon Bills of Mortality," with its early revelation of the statistical regularity of characteristics (life expectancy, murder/suicide rate, etc.) across populations and over time. While Michel Foucault was perhaps not the first, he is very likely the most emphatic among historians of statistics to locate this changing discourse of population at the centre of the story of a far more general shift crystallizing over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, between two different regimes of knowledge, power and government. The hypothesis that is proposed by Foucault and (though with different emphasis) by other historians of statistical thought such as Ian Hacking and Theodor Porter is that the "invention" of population – a quantitative and dynamic figure, with its own regularities and rhythms over time –provides the primary object upon which modern "governmentality" is constituted. As Porter puts it:

> If statistics provided bureaucracies with some of the knowledge that is indispensable to power, they also suggest certain limitations to this power. The limitations in question are not constitutional ones, but constraints that now seemed to exist independently of any particular formal arrangements of

government. For the expansion in the scope of numerical investigations was accompanied by an important change in the conception of their object. (Porter 26)

This very gradual shift between two modes of imagining population first begins in the mid-18th century and is institutionalized in Europe by the early 19th century.[1] In its earlier mode, exemplified in work of Johann Peter Süssmilch *(The Divine Order in the Circumstances of the Human Sex, Birth, Death and Reproduction* 1741)*,* the measurement of population functioned essentially as a tool of the state (a role that the word *statist*ics continues to reflect), giving a quantitative figure to its populous. Statistics at this stage is largely restricted to the enumeration of a previously unquantifiable and indistinguishable multitude. Crucial to this moment is the idea, dominant then and remaining residually active today, that the size of a kingdom's population is the prime measurement of its wealth and power. In this early statistical conception of population, a quantified population enables a new precision in the measurement of the sovereign's power. It also for the first time made the relationship between labour, its reproduction and the general fluctuations in trade and productivity available as an object of knowledge.

The emergence of a second mode of statistical thinking is exemplified in Thomas Robert Malthus' infamous 1798 essay on the principle of population. Here one finds population grasped no longer as simply a measurement of the power or wealth of the state, but rather as an entity relatively autonomous from the state, governed more strongly by the momentum of its own processes, customs, and 'nature' than by the interest or act of the sovereign. This is also, of course, the moment that the mass behaviour of human

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[1] The most commonly studied precursors to the shift in function of statistical demography in government evident in the statistical thought of the early 19th century are the physiocratics of the mid-18th century. See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* 96-110, and Spengler, *French Predecessors of Malthus* 170-211.

population becomes imagined, in itself, as threat. By the time of Malthus' essay, the behaviour of populations assumes the appearance of having its own momentum, its own necessity; moreover, by providing the conceptual means for fusing a (positivist) agent of natural history with the political history of a class, nation or "people," population becomes an object of intense manipulation, mythmaking and reactionary, racist distortion. At a deeper level, statistical demography's aim and understanding of these 'natural' laws brings with it a new logic of social behaviour over time.[2] As Ian Hacking demonstrates in his intellectual history of probability, the emergence of this new, relatively autonomous, modern concept of population is also inextricably bound to statistics' newfound, mathematical capacity to, as he puts it, "tame chance." And so while this conjuncture provides the basis for Foucault's genealogy of the biopolitical control of population and the subjectivizing power of the "norm," Hacking points out that the calculability of regularities across populations also produces an (almost religious) elevation of chance, irregularity and contingency.[3] Grasped in terms of a more general epistemology or knowledge regime, this statistical project of capturing contingency, as I

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[2] While differing historical accounts of this shift are certainly available, the characteristics of the transformation are broadly speaking attributed in the same way. Foucault, for instance, identifies a precursor to this shift much earlier, with the physiocrats in the mid-18th century, yet states the case for its significance in almost identical terms:

> The mercantilist, cameralist, or, if you like, Colbertian project was situated within the relationship of the sovereign's will to the subjected will of the people, in relation to subjects of right, subjects subject to a law, subjects who can be framed by regulations. Now with the physiocrats and, more generally, with the eighteenth century economists, I think the population no longer appears as a collection of subjects of right, as a collection of subject wills who must obey the sovereign's will through the intermediary of regulations, laws, edicts, and so on. It will be considered as a set of processes to be managed at the level and on the basis of what is natural in these processes. (Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* 98).

[3] "Chance, which was once the superstition of the vulgar, became the centerpiece of natural and social science. [...] Parallel to the taming of chance of which I speak, there arose a self-conscious conception of pure irregularity, of something wilder than the kinds of chance that had been excluded by the Age of Reason. It harked back, in part, to something ancient or vestigial. It also looked into the future, to new, and often darker visions of the person than any that I discuss." (Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*, 10).

will discuss in a moment, forms one important point of articulation for extending an idea of demography that would encompass cinema as well.

For my present purposes, these modern beginnings of the concept of population imply two significant features of the truth procedure of demography that, while I will only gesture toward them here, run throughout this dissertation as structuring problems. In the *first* place, the constitution of the modern object called population is tied in a fundamental way to the emergence of the liberal economic concept of the market. While none would dispute the importance of statistics for contemporary economic analysis – indeed, today, econometrics represents among the most active and, arguably, most influential arm of statistical research – at a deep structural level, the evolution of the statistical logic of population from a quantifiable measure of the sovereign's power to a self-regulating entity is inextricably bound up with the story of the emergence of the modern conception of a self-regulating market; the Smithian "invisible hand" is genuinely unthinkable without the statistical application of the "law of large numbers." Population is also the term that emerges when the appearance of the "natural" order of the market threatens to come undone – though here it is not population as a probabilistic function of statistical regularity, but rather population as biological necessity, of eating, replicating and dying, that becomes unavoidable. To examine the rhetorics of population crisis over the past forty years, as the research gathered together in my present study does, underlines the degree to which this originary imbrication of the modern construction of population and (market) economy, far from being a matter of historical coincidence, remains a residual but in no sense less vital aspect of our social and

economic imaginary. The concordance of population crisis and economic crisis which recur ever more frequently over the course of the twentieth century highlights the consistency with which the reproduction and reinvention of the ideology of a capitalist market economy returns to the "problem of population." Remaining at this level of broad strokes, what seems equally clear is that the imagination of crisis under capital not only reasserts this constitutive linkage to and dependence upon the statistical logic of population, it also functions to reactivate the latent threat of the relative autonomy of the *demos* that statistical knowledge in general has always sought to measure, record, represent and, thereby, control.

The *second* significant feature implied in my brief sketch of the historical emergence of the modern, statistical idea of population is its aesthetic dimension. Here, I return again to the sense of a rendering, making visible or apparent buried in the etymology of demo*graphy*. While Edward Tuft and others have assembled the case for the shaping influence of graphical methods on the development of statistical thought and practice, my interest in thinking demography as aesthetic, and finally in terms of a specifically cinematic aesthetics, refers to a different set of problems and practices.[4] At stake here is an expansion of both terms, demography and aesthetics. The conceptual spaces for critique opened by the expansion of these two terms and the resonances between the two representational systems that they name bring me to the core questions that will be explored in this dissertation.

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[4] For a particularly relevant account of the visuality of statistical and economic thought and one which has helped to shape much of my thinking here, see Susan Buck-Morss' "Envisioning Capital: Political Economy on Display."

Census/*Sensus*: Demography as Political Aesthetic

One of the more important contributions of Jacques Rancière's recent aesthetics philosophy has been to propose an enlargement of the meaning of the aesthetic and the purview of aesthetic theory. "Aesthetics," as he puts it,

> can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time. It is on the basis of this primary aesthetics that it is possible to raise the question of 'aesthetic practices' as I understand them, that is forms of visibility that disclose artistic practices, the place they occupy, what they 'do' or 'make' from the standpoint of what is common to the community. (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* 13)

For Rancière, to speak of politics as such is first and foremost to address an aesthetic problem and *vice versa*, insofar as both hinge upon a struggle at the level of the "sensible" or "perceptible' (*aestheta*). The sensible names a field that encompasses while also exceeding artistic representation, conveying the sense of a wider, shifting problem of perception (or perceptibility) and the inseparability of the art historical development of forms and media of representation from a social struggle over the "field of perception-in-common"; in this sense, aesthetics, as the partition of the sensible becomes the definite site for politics (Rancière "Dissenting Words" 122). In Rancière's account, this struggle over "what is seen" takes place between two mutable, but essentially timeless orders or logics: the police – "a partition of the sensible characterized by the absence of a void or a supplement" – and the *demos*, "the category of peoples who do not count" (Rancière, *Dissensus* 21, 12). Rancière's deceptively simple intervention into political theory,

undergirding his subsequent aesthetic writing, is to subtract politics entirely from the nominally "political" order of what he designates police, or consensus and, instead, to reserve the term politics exclusively for the space or moment in which the *demos*, or "the unaccounted for," force their way into the field of the sensible, through a radical act of appearing or (self-) naming – an eruption of dissensus that discloses the incommensurable "presence of two worlds in one" (21-22; see also Rancière, *Dissensus* 21-42). While I am unwilling to adopt *tout court* the categories and what I read as the (finally) anarchic thrust of Rancière's political theory, the manner in which his thinking frames the object of population and the practice of enumeration goes to the heart of the problem I am proposing.

The terms of Rancière's thinking about politics and aesthetics, beginning with the homophonic association of *sensus* and *census*, already imply the way in which population, as a means of representing people, is inscribed in his philosophy: the eventful, properly political eruption of dis*sensus* within con*sensus* is in numerous places explicitly described in terms of a "miscount" in a way that positions the enumeration of people as antithetical to politics in Rancière's sense of the term.[5] While an enumeration of the parts of a scene, situation or field of perceptibility refers to a practice that clearly exceeds the particular case of the statistical count of a population, the privileged place of the latter in Rancière's thinking is unambiguous. As Rancière himself has confirmed, the identification of police with a false, or anti- politics of consensus draws heavily, as

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[5] "'Proletarian' subjectification defines a subject of wrong – by superimposition in relation to the multitude of workers. What is subjectified is neither work nor destitution, but the simple counting of the uncounted... Politics in general is made up of such *miscounts*." (Ranciere, *Dissensus* 38-39 [original emphasis]).

indeed all of Rancière's thinking might be said to do, on Foucault and his sustained elaboration of the role of police with a broader apparatus of control that includes the logistics of population at its core.[6] Rancière's account diverges from the Foucauldian one in the emphasis Rancière places on the specifically aesthetic dimension of the police-population apparatus, but also to the degree to which his thought aims to identify concrete routes for imagining and, indeed, enacting an alternative politics. In *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, Rancière writes:

> properly understood, [consensus] defines a mode of symbolic structuration of the community that evacuates the political core constituting it, namely dissensus. A *political* community is in effect a community that is structurally divided, not between divergent interest groups and opinions but divided in relation to itself. A political 'people' is never the same thing as the sum of a population. It is always a form of supplementary symbolization in relation to any counting of the population and its parts. And this form of symbolization is always a litigious one. ... Consensus is the reduction of these various 'peoples' into a single people identical with the count of a population and its parts, of the interests of a global community and its parts. [...] Insofar as it strives to reduce the people to the population, consensus in fact strives to reduce right to fact (115).

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[6] The indebtedness of Ranciere's concept of the police to Foucault is profound. As early as *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault identifies the police as "the totality of measures which make work possible and necessary for all those who would not live without it" (46). Of the numerous times Foucault subsequently returns to the emergence of the police as both project and concrete apparatus (see, in particular "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," 169-171), his most substantial account can be found in his 1977-1978 lectures at the Collège du France , *Security, Territory, Population*, where he is interested precisely in the coincidence of the emergence of the police, the modern object of population and eighteenth century statistical thought. The proximity of Foucault's concept of the Police and Rancière's – particularly as it refers to a politics of the "uncounted" (or undocumented) – is clearest in his lecture of 29 March, 1978, where he concludes an survey of the role and meaning of the police as follows:

> Finally, the last object of police is circulation, the circulation of goods, of the products of men's. This circulation should be understood first of all in the sense of the material instruments with which it must be provided. Thus police will be concerned with the condition and development of roads, and with the navigability of rivers and canals, etcetera. [...] But by "circulation" we should understand not only this material network that allows the circulation of goods and possibly of men, but also the circulation itself, that is to say the set of regulations, constraints, and limits, or the facilities and encouragements that will allow the circulation of men and things in the kingdom and possibly beyond its borders. From this stem those typical police regulations, some of which seek to suppress vagrancy, others to facilitate the circulation of goods in this or that direction, [and] others that want to prevent qualified workers from leaving their -place of work, or especially the kingdom. After health and the objects of bare necessity, after the population itself, this whole field of circulation will become the object of police. (419-420)

Positioning population, in this way, within part of a broader "mode of symbolic structuration of community," and in his suggestive identification of the troubled meeting of *census* and *sensus* as a way of re-envisioning a politics of the aesthetic, Rancière draws as close as anyone to describing the diffuse object to which I am trying to give shape. It is also from this initial, heuristic point of departure in Rancière's political aesthetics, however, that my own thinking begins to depart. Stressing the supplementary relation of the appearance of the *demos* within the giveness of the consensual order of the police, Rancière is careful to position the actantial arrangement of forces in his analysis in a way that avoids the pitfalls (as he sees them) of the modernist aesthetic logic of antagonism and autonomy. While a "political 'people'", for Rancière, is never reducible to a population, as "a form of supplementary symbolization" it cannot come into being except through, or as a (uncounted) part of a population. The political and any political aesthetic, in this sense, cannot be a matter of confrontation between blocks, factions or even classes in the familiar sense of these terms; rather, politics *appears* just as its agent (the *demos*, "the part of those who have *no part*") appears. The political and the aesthetic theory to which it gives shape are broadly consonant with a philosophy of imminence, where politics emerges as the un*looked*-for semantic, epistemic or aesthetic rupture of structural disagreement – a fact underlined at length by Alain Badiou in his critique of Rancière's thought (Badiou, *Metapolitics* 107-124). By positioning the logic of population as that ambient positivity of power which a genuine politics of the people (*demos*) breaks from, Rancière's political theory repeats a not unfamiliar elevation of the contingent and

eventful, one which might be said to be *the* definitive gesture of postwar continental thought.

To avoid a head-on collision with the problems entailed in the elevation of the event in contemporary French leftist thought, I want to approach a critique of the operative distinctions of Rancière's political theory – consensus/dissensus, police/*demos* – by retaining a focus on how Rancière imagines and perhaps misidentifies what is specific to the statistical symbolization of people, which is to say, the population. Where a more careful apprehension of population can be seen to productively intrude here is precisely in the way the logic through which it is constituted, which is to say the calculative gaze of statistics, enfolds within itself *both* the rationalizing, enumerative symbolic practice with which Rancière identifies "the police" *and* the "dissenting" force of the contingent, the "provisional accident" (*Dissensus* 35) that characterizes the eventful appearance of politics for Rancière. Indeed, what makes the history of statistical thought such a illuminating lens through which to interpret the social and cultural specificity of modernity has been the degree to which it stands as perhaps the most distilled and consequential concretion of the dialectical relationship of the rationalizing optics of domination and the eventful promise of contingency. It is this sense that the "supplementary" relationship of the unaccounted-for within the consensual "distribution of the sensible" on which Rancière's political aesthetics depends appears insufficient. Particularly when positioned within a broader logic of capital accumulation that depends to an ever greater extent on the continuous emergence of the un(fore)seen "void" in its systems, or for the arrival of the new (niche) subjectivity "unaccounted for," Rancière's

wager on the incommensurable presentation of the *demos* exists in an uncertain relationship to the parasitic dependence of a contemporary mode of finance capital upon risk, contingency and upheaval.

So, where does this leave the prospects of an expanded demography of cinema? What remains eminently useful in Rancière's writing is the expanded conception of aesthetics in terms of a "distribution of the sensible," a concept that seems particularly well-suited to cinema. Rancière's program for aesthetics extends Foucault's election of statistical thought as the privileged apparatus of the post-disciplinary hegemon in a way that presents a compelling basis for theorizing cinema as an aspect of this wider "symbolic structuration" of the sensible. And yet, if the language of the partition through which Rancière succeeds, to a point, in suturing together a post-Foucauldian aesthetics appears to finally break down when held up to the operation of the statistical itself (and, for that matter, of late capitalism as well), what remains offers little undisturbed ground upon which to build a concrete interpretative approach to the actual objects of visual culture, excepting perhaps a convincing theoretical frame within which to rethink a ("post-political") sociology of art today – a turn that would no doubt prompt a chuckle from Rancière's well-known antagonist Pierre Bourdieu. In other words, while conceptual space opened by the work of the "distribution of the sensible" provides an immensely productive frame within which to explore the statistical optic of population and the cinematic image as a single system of the sensible, without the eventful splitting of the sensible entailed in his conception of politics as dissensus, how it might generate a hermeneutic, or form of cultural critique is unclear.

The distance of a conventional film theory approach from Rancière's political aesthetics is instructive, signalling the uncomfortable relationship between cinema studies proper from the philosophical mode of inquiry into film found in French thought since Gilles Deleuze's groundbreaking books on cinema.[7] Like Deleuze, Rancière begins from a standpoint that collapses the referential or representational distance entailed in the traditional approach of film criticism and theory – between, for instance, the image and the real, or image and thought. Though Rancière's "distribution of the sensible" is politically oriented in a way that Deleuze's philosophy of the film image is not – a fact that is inseparable from the vastly more substantial historicity of the object and practice of Rancière's aesthetic project – the critical intervention of "the distribution of the sensible" remains focused, at base, in the degree to which it short-circuits the underlying semiotic foundation of conventional critical apprehensions of the problematic of cinema and the image more broadly. What is compelling, then, about the expanded aesthetic field that Rancière's writing opens up is also that which contributes to a rethinking of the parameters of film theory more generally. Of course, the contemporary challenge posed to many well established lines of investigation within film studies exceed and precede the influence of Rancière's recent writing on aesthetics, responding to a broader set of shifts at the level of media technology – most notably, the use of digital video and growing prominence of new media – and, perhaps even more profoundly, to the widespread

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[7] Concluding his remarks on the impact of Deleuze in his canonical text, *Film Theory*, Robert Stam writes: "While one can acknowledge the brilliance of Deleuze's analyses, and while one can dialogue with Deleuze, or do with other philosophers something analogous to what Deleuze does with Bergson, it seems somewhat more problematic to 'apply' Deleuze, to simply 'translate' analysis into a Deleuzian language" (262). For a broadly consonant, if less diplomatic view from the point of view of French philosophy, see Alain Badiou's remarks in *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being* (14-15).

recognition of the implications of the changed social and economic situation of cultural production.[8]

It is very much in this context that Mary Ann Doane has recently invoked a series of questions concerning the relationship of statistical thinking to the emergence of a rendering of time specific to cinema. In her recent book, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, Doane seeks to position early photography and cinematic media as a "crucial participant" in a broader epistemological shift that depends on the development of disciplines and technologies, primary among them statistics, which cohere around ongoing attempts to represent time and "domesticate contingency." For Doane, "the fully developed classical cinema, like statistics, acknowledges contingency and indeterminacy while at the same time offering the law of their regularity" (31); both, she argues, "work indeterminacy" in a way that enables the collusion of "knowledge, the management of chance and dominance," while at the same time maintaining and even amplifying through its focus, the pleasures, allure and anxiety of the unpredictable and heterogeneous that guarantees the possibility of perpetual newness. On one level, Doane repeats an interpretation of industrial capitalism and the culture of modernity in terms of a dialectic

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[8] Alongside theoretical accounts of a society of spectacle, simulation and simulacrum that runs from Guy Debord to Jean Baudrillard, this problem has been most exhaustively articulated by Marxist theorists, for whom the crisis of mediation *as such*, which this socio-economic development seems to raise, is recognized as an urgent political problem. While the notion of the "real subsumption" of the reproduction of labour under capital forms one thread of this discourse (for instance, Negri, *Insurgencies* 25-36, 251-253), the more relevant formulation of the problem has come in the form of a periodizing claim, most famously drawn by Fredric Jameson, who writes:

> [I]n this new stage, the very sphere of culture itself has been expanded, becoming coterminous with market society in such a way that the cultural is no longer limited to its earlier, traditional or experimental forms, but is consumed throughout daily life itself, in shopping, in professional activities, in the various often televisual forms of leisure, in production for the market and in the consumption of those market products...Social space is now completely saturated with the culture of the image. (Jameson, *The Cultural Turn* 111)

of time that was developed extensively by Walter Benjamin and by many others since. Within this familiar narrative of the time of modernity, however, Doane's superimposition of the relationship between statistical epistemologies and the system of cinematic time does seem to add a previously buried thread to this story.

What is more consequential about Doane's account of the shared epistemological project of statistical and cinematic representation (and the thing that, as she notes, imbues her study with a particular contemporary relevance) is the manner in which it offers a new way of positing the problem of the indexicality of the cinematic image. It is in the special claim of the cinematic apparatus to capture the trace, imprint and presence of a moment in time that Doane identifies the basis for its relationship to the statistical project of mathematically fixing the apparently random collection of mass behaviour in terms of the probabilistic regularities. Well aware of the extent to which the notion of indexicality of cinema has, with the significant exception of *André* Bazin, always been "anathema to film theory," Doane insists that it is necessary to re-engage the issue of indexicality:

> From Rudolf Arnheim, for whom the deviation from the real assured the status of film as art, to *Screen* film theory of the 1970s and its critique of realism as ideological, the cinema's alleged adherence to the referent was something to be denied, rejected, transcended. But indexicality can and must be dissociated from its sole connection to the concept of realism, the reflection of a coherent, familiar and recognizable world. Indexicality is a function that is essentially without content – in language, it is allied with the pure denotation of "this" or "here it is." Essentially, contentless, it is free to convey anything and everything. In the cinema, it is the guarantee that anything and everything is filmable, the implicit thesis of the Lumière catalogues and the plethora of actualities produced in the earliest years. And while the notion that film as a record of time is sufficient rationale for its existence and dissemination disappeared fairly rapidly, the concept of the filmability of the contingent without limit persists and subtends/supports mainstream classical narrative. It explains the overwhelming multiplicity and diversity of detail which contributes to the sense that a film must be experienced rather than described, that it is fundamentally alien to interpretation or translation.

It allies the cinema with the logic of statistics and the imperative to domesticate contingency. (25)

Without delving in full into the development of this current in Doane's recent writing,[9] it is sufficient here to point to two consequential implications of even this admittedly minimal gloss. First, the proposition that the association of indexicality with realism must be undone introduces a profusion of possibilities of rethinking both terms as well as their dialectical relation over time. In a closely related note, Tom Gunning has highlighted the extent to which the conjoining of cinematic realism and the Peircean indexical sign – a fusion he traces back to Peter Wollen's seminal essay "The Semiology of the Cinema" – rests, among other things, upon a willingness to ignore the distinction between a "logic" (i.e. the epistemological system of Peircean semiotics) and an aesthetic (i.e. cinematic realism) (Gunning 32).[10] As Gunning is right to suggest, this dissociation bypasses a dead-end in the theory of realism, a proposition that, as I will argue at a later point in this dissertation, resonates in the work of a number of cultural theorists outside of film studies (see chapter 2). For Doane, however, this dissociation is aimed rather at dislodging the concept of the indexical itself from a bad normative argument about the truth claim of the cinematic image, providing a basis for thinking the emergence of the cinematic image in terms of the logic and knowledge effect of the cinematic image, without jettisoning the problem into the realm of philosophy. In this sense, to speak of the indexicality of cinema, for Doane, is less an ontological claim about the nature of cinema (its closeness

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[9] In addition to *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, see the essays collected in the 2007 special issue of the journal *Differences*, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," guest edited by Doane.

[10] This language is, in fact, taken from Wollen's essay, from which Gunning quotes a "rarely noted" caveat in Wollen's reading of the indexicality of Bazin's photographic ontology: "But whereas Peirce made his observation in order to found a logic, Bazin wished to found an aesthetic" (Wollen 126, quoted in Gunning 32).

or identity to reality it records) than it is a means of identifying an epistemological system that cinema participates in (re)producing.

The second point I want to take from Doane comes from the core aspect of her argument outlined above, namely, that it is in the imputed (and lasting) notion that cinema is imbued with the capacity to capture the contingency and presence of time – its claim to an indexical relationship to the real – that we discover its importance, alongside the homologous practice of statistical "taming of chance" (Hacking), as part of a shared epistemological project of modernity. While an important overlap appears here with Rancière's characterization of the calculative operation of the police and its partition of the sensible, it is crucial to recognize that, for Doane, the relation of cinema and statistics not only demands attention to its historical specificity, but, insofar as what is at stake is a shared mode of semi-autonomous technologies (cinema, statistics) for grasping or *representing* a material condition (indexical, enumerative/probabilistic), this shared field remains irrevocably conditioned by the problem of mediation.[11] In other words, while the conceptual space opened by the "distribution of the sensible" effects a kind of eclipsing of aesthetics with the problematic of disciplines, technologies and discursive practices

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[11] This difference is explicitly formulated in Doane's differentiation of her methodology from that of Foucault:

> For the later Foucault, a generalized and immanent notion of power is posited as ultimate determinant. This power resides within and orients a system of institutions, discourses, and practices. It has a positive role [...] and cannot be reduced to the functions of law or the concept of master. Power, however, is disengaged from any explanatory framework, such as Marxism or psychoanalysis, and becomes self-motivating, absolute, unspecifiable as an entity. My contention here, on the other hand, is that the overdetermined possibility of restructuring and rethinking time in modernity is subtended and supported by the historically specific changes within an industrial and commodity capitalism in which labor time as the measure of value is reconceptualized and processes of abstraction and rationalization become crucial to that project. (Doane, *Emergence* 21-22)

that organize the social field into an accountable unit, in Doane, these same forces appear as an assemblage of which photographic and cinematic technologies form but a part.

What I am trying to establish at this abstract level of the aesthetic or cinematic as such is a theoretical basis for a more concrete and historically situated account of the relationship of statistical demography and cinema. While Rancière and Doane organize (in different ways) a provisional theoretical space within which these two discursive and representational practices might be productively thought together, my own interest is finally less to trace the dimensions of this space of theoretical encounter than to fill it; or, in other words, to apply these theoretical problems to a particular historical conjuncture. Indeed, if there is a theoretical claim of my dissertation, its primary reference is just as much historiographic as it is aesthetic.

Workers Leaving the Factory: Periodizing Cinema's Demographies

In 1995, Harun Farocki completed a short, 35 minute film essay entitled "Workers Leaving the Factory" (*Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*). Inspired by the famous 1895 Lumière brothers film of the same name, Farocki's film is the result of an archival project that sought to assemble sequences from the history of narrative cinema in which this early cinematic sequence of workers leaving workplaces recurs. The overarching thesis that organizes Farocki's film essay centers on the consistencies and transformations in this archive of images of the distribution of labouring populations moving across the threshold of the factory gate. The factory gate becomes, in Farocki's presentation, the space regulating not only the flow of workers in and out, but of the circulation of

information and images of social production. The sequence with which the film begins, of *fin-de-cycle* workers jostling through the wooden gates of the Lumière factory, is first supplemented by images from the early twentieth century, with workers rushing, pressing and fleeing the factory. Quickly, however, Farocki's attention turns more insistently to

Fig. 1.1 From D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1931): "This is probably the largest shootout in front of a factory gate in one hundred years of film history" (Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory*).

the factory gate itself as a mechanism for excluding and averting labour. In its reconstruction on screen, this is also a reversal of the position of camera and worker, as the workers now appear unemployed at the gates, either being expelled or shot at by police, or ("a quieter horror") with their faces pressed against the gate which bars them from productive society. For Farocki, the image of workers leaving the factory becomes emblematic of a more general transformation that encompasses the history of both the

visual representation of the factory as a site of social production and the evolution of the mode of production itself. "The first camera in the history of cinema was pointed at a factory," Farocki writes, "but a century later it can be said that film is hardly drawn to the factory and is even repelled by it" (Farocki, "Workers Leaving the Factory").

Upon the cinematic space of the threshold of the factory, Farocki's film expands, just as it specifies the referent of the "isomorphism of entrances" that founds Daney's cine-demography, conjoining the history of the behaviour of "film crowds" to the history of the construction of a labouring population. Attentive to the overlapping of these two histories (of the industrial proletariat and its visual representation in film), Farocki's piece forces a recognition of the way in which the distribution of the crowd, its marked characteristics, its movement, its directionality and above all its relationship to the circuit and symbols of production condense an indispensable idea about society. As much the specification of an ideologeme as an imageme, then, the visual figure of *workers leaving the factory* manages a kind of abstraction of the lives of these potential characters in the crowd of workers into a mass figure in space, a collective tendency in motion and a bearer of the affective propulsion of a common cause (whether racing home from work, or waiting for entrance into working society). As the narrator of Farocki's film puts it:

> The work structure synchronizes the workers, the factory gates group them, and this process of compression produces the image of a work force. As may be realized or brought to mind by the portrayal, the people passing through the gates evidently have something fundamental in common. Images are closely related to concepts, thus this film has become a rhetorical figure. One finds it used in documentaries, in industrial and propaganda films, often with music and/or words as backing, the image being given a textual meaning such as "the exploited," "the industrial proletariat," "the workers of the fist," or "the society of the masses."

What I would call a materialist cine-demography, Farocki's film describes the compression of individuals into a workforce at the level of the image, at the same time capturing an aspect of the larger historical production of the abstraction called a population, a workforce under capital. Taken in this sense, the aesthetic dimension of a (cine-) demography can account not only for the enumerative projections and statistical production of the object of population, but also for a visual projection and cinematic production of the subject of population. The echo of the press of a cinema audience leaving the theatre in this reconstruction is not accidental. Reflecting the entrance and exit of the cinema audience itself, Farocki's collection of the workers' entrances and exits from the factory is also a rehearsal of the production of the image of a workforce. The reproduction and the reception of the image of the population of labour thus fold into one another, revealing not only proximity of the crowding of the factory gate and the busy box office, but also the barred gate of the factory and the empty seats of the theatre. The thinning of cinema audiences that forms the context for Daney's cine-demographic speculation is no less clearly projected, if indirectly, in the growing tendency for the image of the worker barred or repelled from the factory.

Farocki's interest in the role of visual culture in the constitution of the European industrial workforce over the twentieth century is just as much the project of reconstructing a visual archive of the undoing or decline of industrial production in the West: the genealogy of the moment that the camera (and the cinema) no longer waits for the workers outside the factory gate, but rather becomes a part of the apparatus aimed from within the factory, guarding against the worker's entrance into the space of

production. In this sense, while Farocki's images are primarily drawn from the cinematic archive of the uneven, but fairly continuous growth of industrial production in the West over the first half of the twentieth century, the questions it raises are fixed firmly in the long historical period – again, not undisturbed - of economic decline that historians of capitalism now trace back to the profitability crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While Farocki's film tends to leave implicit any pronouncement about the *future* of the image of the worker leaving the factory, the sense that "workers leaving the factory" describes today a systemic trend, rather than a repetition of an everyday event, seems a useful point of departure for grasping the contemporary situation of a cinematic demography.

Fig. 1.2 From Vsevolod Pudovkin's *The Deserter* (*Desertir*, 1933): "[The people] are looking out from the prison of unemployment to the freedom called 'paid labor.' Filmed through the bars they appear to have been shut away in a camp already" (Farocki, *Workers Leaving the Factory*).

The Lateness of Capitalism

My own research begins where Farocki's film-essay leaves off, looking back over four decades of what the economic historian Robert Brenner has called the "long downturn" of the profitability of capital that begins in the 1970s and continues today in a state of seemingly permanent and genuinely systemic crisis (Brenner, *Economics of Global Turbulence* 145-163). Over the course of this most recent epoch of capitalist development, particularly the transformation and redistribution of labour over this period, the composition, function and social meaning of populations off-screen appears, in several ways, very different than it did for most of the century to which Farocki's film addresses itself. Several differences stand out. First, the parameters of the object called "population" have concretely realized the spatial tendency toward a genuinely global demographic frame. This fact is exemplified in the migration of population concerns from a largely expert, academic and nationally-bounded affair, to a problem of "development" and "ecology" moderated by supranational and intergovernmental organizations that might be said to begin in earnest with the World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974.[12] Though demographic measurements remain, in most cases, tethered to national censuses and continue to be organized and interpreted along the geographical and (crypto-) raciological demarcations of nation-states, the global

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[12] The *concept* of world population is certainly much older than this. Indeed, the decennial World Population Conference was first held in 1954 and again in 1964. What makes these conferences illustrative of the change in the role and function of population, however, is captured in the 1974 World Population Conference, where for the first time delegates from world governments (135 countries were represented) attended the conference. Excepting, the not inconsiderable efforts of "charitable" foundations associated with the eugenics and "family planning" movement in the United States and, at an earlier moment, the United Kingdom, population appeared as truly global concern, with global participants, in the 1970s. For an excellent account of this history, see Matthew Connelly's *Fatal Misconceptions*.

population that grew increasingly prominent in the science fictions of the past century is an unavoidable fact today. This relatively underappreciated aspect of the process or idea of globalization comes into particularly sharp focus today with the recognition of pervasive trends toward demographic aging and decline around the world. The growing body of statistics and projections of global population aging are a poignant illustration of the degree to which contemporary demographic discourse provides one of the more descriptive ways of representing the totality of social relations and divisions after the waning of the geopolitical blocks and divisions of the Cold War.

A map of population aging today, representing the percentage of national
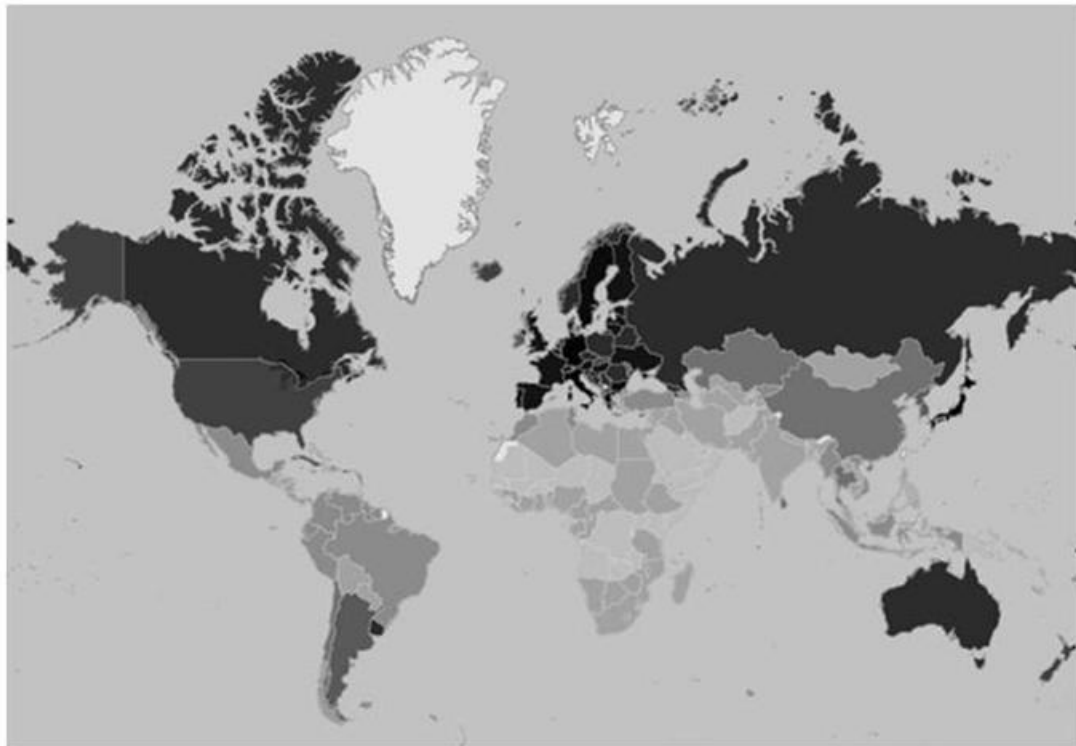
Fig. 1.3 World population map, by percentage of states' populations over the age of 65. Darker regions indicate higher percentage, from 0 - 27%. The World Bank. "World Development Indicators." December 2010 Revision.

populations over the age of 65, presents a surprisingly stark bisection of the world into the young and aging. On one hand, visually representing the globe in this way underlines the extent to which an axial division of labour across the global North and South has transformed not only economic life on the planet, but also the fundamental rhythms of the generation and reproduction of human life. At the same time, what appear as the exceptional cases on such a map today, for instance the relatively aged populations in some of the poorest nations of Eastern Europe or in Russia, begin to suggest the way in which the ostensible congruence of aging and economic development is already beginning to break down; the rapidly aging populations of China, Brazil and many other "developing" nations are projected to thoroughly undo any sense of an old modernization model for explaining the declining total fertility rate and population aging. As rapidly declining fertility rates and aging populations begin to appear in ways that do not align with the overarching narrative of the theory of "demographic transition" – briefly, that populations naturally transition to lower fertility levels in tandem with socio-economic (and moral) development – the bad universalism of liberal economics ("a rising tide that lifts all boats") is revealed as a lie.

At the same time, demographic behaviour provides dramatic evidence of a more complex interpenetration of the cultural, economic and socio-biological, a situation in which for example, the spread of cable television and American visual culture in a country like Brazil has been demonstrated as one of the key determinants in plummeting fertility rates in the country over the past two decades (see Potter *et. al.*).[13] Thus, not

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[13] A broader overview of this and related research can be found in recent interdisciplinary explorations of

despite, but precisely because of these ambiguities, the possibility that global trends in population aging today realize (or produce) a certain capacity of population statistics to represent the social process of globalization in terms of the behaviour of human reproduction, in the form of a kind of biopolitical world picture, is, at the very least, worth a close look on the part of any theoretical discourse trying to understand not only the socio-economic composition of the world system, but also its cultural dimension. While the comparison of economic measurements of "development" like Gross Domestic Product or Purchasing Power Parity underlines the continued (if more mobile) disparities of wealth generated by capitalist growth, the behaviour of populations themselves and particularly the measurements (of total fertility, life expectancy, age and gender composition) that undergird their absolute numeric growth or decline, not only provide an important indicator of the way labour and production are distributed, but also register (in a way purely economic measurements cannot) the degree to which the expanded reproduction of capital has actually come to subsume the reproduction of human life itself. (The causal relationship that finds declining total fertility rates following the increased activity of women in the work place is the most obvious example.) In other words, at the outset of the twenty first century, the process of what Marx anticipated as "the real subsumption of labour under capital" has reached a point when it is worth contemplating the extent to which the mass behaviour of populations itself becomes a

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diffusion theory of demographic transition. See in particular, Robert Hornik and Emily Mcanany's "Mass Media and Fertility Change ."

powerful means of performing a "cognitive mapping" of social relations across the globe.[14]

With the 1994 publication of the World Bank's document "Averting the Old Age Crisis: Policies to Protect the Old and Promote Growth," the projective narrative of aging societies was made sensible to a wider public, outlining political-economic implications that give shape to a radically new scenario for the capitalist imagination of disaster. Subsequent high-profile pieces in *Foreign Policy* and *The Economist,* and numerous special reports over the past decade have focused alarm, thrusting the rhetoric of a "grey dawn" and a global "baby bust" into wider circulation. Most of these pieces begin with a version of the same journalistic hook:

> Not so long ago, we were warned that rising global population would inevitably bring world famine...Instead, the global growth rate [of population] dropped from 2 percent in the mid-1960s to roughly half that today, with many countries no longer producing enough babies to avoid falling populations. Having too many people on the planet is no longer demographers' chief worry; now, having too few is. (Longman, "Think Again" 54)

Setting aside the way such statements obscure the degree to which the (growing) number of people on the planet still poses serious ecological and economic challenges and will continue to for some time, what is noteworthy about these repeated comparisons of the contemporary aging "crisis" with the 1970s' alarm about overpopulation is the way in which this naming of the absolute reversal in the trajectory of the "population crisis," becomes, in effect, a way of establishing an equivalence between the two under the sign of "crisis." Indeed, the (quite simply false) implication that with the emergence of a

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[14] Jameson has, in fact, offered some speculation specifically on the usefulness of demography for conceiving of and narrating a postmodern and globalized social order. See *Postmodernism* 358-360.

'new' crisis (aging), the old one (overpopulation) has been overcome, builds upon this equivalence a teleology, reaffirming the durability of the ideological alchemy of capital accumulation, wherein "[e]very limit becomes a barrier to be overcome" (Marx, *Grundrisse* 418). As critical explorations of the recent development of pension funds make clear, there is no lack of evidence that population aging has in fact already been transformed into an immensely profitable frontier for capital, at the same time that the immense pools of cheap, disposable labour that remain of the 1970s "population bomb" continue to ensure high profit margins for investment in globalized industrial production. Yet, while capital adjusts as quickly as ever to the latest crisis, the paradoxes produced in the attempt to turn population decline into a surmountable figure of "crisis" and growth rise just as consistently to the surface.

"The future is older than the past" reads the witty title above a graph in a recent issue of *Foreign Policy* depicting the dramatic increase projected over the coming forty years of the portion of the world's population over the age of 65. A postmodern proposition if ever there was one, paradoxical dicta such as this one typify the current demographic crisis discourse and its projection of a mass figure of a future decline – or, still more ambivalently, an aged future – that fits uncomfortably within the essentially modern temporal trajectory that it attempts to resuscitate. We must wait and see whether or not Marx's observation that "an increasing population appears as the basis of accumulation as a continuous process" proves accurate at the level of political economy; across the cultural sphere, however, symptoms of this looming contradiction are already apparent within an imaginary of continuous growth forced to contend with the certainty

that the coming century will bring older and smaller societies. In some respect, these symptomatic torsions can be seen as the product of an anachrony that seems inherent to demography's anticipatory claim to a facticity of the future. Demographic crises are projected probabilistically from quantified behaviour in the past and present (e.g. changes in the total fertility rate) whose effects manifest on the scale of generations. Within the crisis narratives elaborated from demographic projections, there is, on one hand, the projective alarmist time of a sort of scientistic future anterior in which populations are imagined to follow the same smooth lines of growth (or decline) as measures of economic expansion or depression; on the other hand, these changes, even under the most forced and artificial conditions (i.e. national one child policy), remain determined by the generational time of the biological reproduction of a species, in which, for example, a fertility "boom" will echo into the future in 25 to 30 year interval even as the total fertility of the same population might decline. (It is, of course, this anachronistic time-lag and the naturalization of reproductive or generational time that also tends to provide the interpretative space and ideological leverage that has made the "hard figures" of demographic projection such a well-used tool of reactionary ideologues.) Thus, while the specific case of population aging and decline shapes the imagination of a social future that appears radically opposed to the continuous growth axiomatic to modernity and the social reproduction of capital, there is also a deeper way in which the archaic, generational, perhaps one could even say species time of demography itself resists incorporation into the linear temporality of growth or decline. Returning to the field of the cinema from the vantage point of the present, then, demands a certain adjustment or

expansion of the way that I have thus far followed up on Serge Daney's call for "a demography of film beings." If Farocki's reconstruction of the visual archive of "workers leaving the factory" helps to point to an undoing, or reversal of the relationship between population and production that accompanied the classical moment of industrial capitalism, to look back over the past forty years of a late capitalist or *post*-industrial visual culture through the claims of statistical demography adds not only the geographical expansion of population, but also the temporal disruption of the future as decline.

It is finally toward understanding the formation and relationship of these general structural developments – of, in sum, globalization and a late capitalist imagination of decline – that I have found it productive to think demography and cinema together. The chimeric object that I attempt to stage here, a *cine-demography*, provides a means of narrating these epochal changes that the period since the early 1970s has introduced in a way that foregrounds the problem of representation, or rather of *representability* that these changes have introduced. To speculate about what a cinematic demography of late capitalism would look like, in this sense, is to confront the challenge posed by what Fredric Jameson has imagined as the "geopolitical aesthetic." In a particularly relevant passage, Jameson writes:

> for it is ultimately always of the social totality itself that it is a [sic] question in representation, and never more so than in the present age of a multinational global corporate network. It is, indeed, as if the imagination included a sound barrier, undetectable save in those moments in which a representational task or program suddenly collapses. Such a sound barrier (if not the speed of light itself) could be thought of in terms of demography, of the sheer quantities of other people, whose figural categories cease to multiply beyond a certain point. But what is that point, in our time: the mob, the masses in the plaza, seen from above in a literal bird's-eye view; the silent wheeling of great armies on foot, face to face (as in *Spartacus*

[Kubrick, 1960] or Bondarchuck's *War and Peace* [1968])? (Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic* 4)

To add to Jameson's question the complexity of a demographic appearance of the world in which the cognitive and representational limits posed by the sheer quantity of people is twisted by the fact of a simultaneous process of decline and aging would seem to only compound the problem he raises. Yet the metaphorics of decline that emerge from what, to compliment Jameson's "geopolitical unconscious," I will call the *demographic imaginary* of late capitalism, also introduces a generative break with the notion that the illegibility of these collective processes is attributable to their excessive scale and speed alone. What one confronts in the idea of a cine-demography are the collective images of slowing, abandonment and aging existing alongside and emerging from within attempts to give form to an impossible expansion and acceleration of social and economic life.

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This dissertation is comprised of three chapters, each of which attempts in a different way to test how this expanded, aesthetic dimension of demography operates and how it might be situated alongside other critical hermeneutics of culture, visuality and cinema. While the broad problematic that I have outlined above remains constant throughout, the mode of investigation, the construction of my object of analysis and the thematic or tendency through which I focus my attention shift from chapter to chapter. While I do at times draw connections between chapters, I have also deliberately sought to maintain a degree of autonomy between the different cases I have selected. In part, this is a response to the

avowedly experimental kernel of my project. The difficulty and the pleasure of this project has, in large part, come from the relative paucity of available scholarship within which to position an aesthetics of demography, or to imagine demography as an aesthetic problem. The field of population science itself has, by its own admission, tended to lag behind the theoretical "turns" evident in other social sciences. Certainly, despite the ever larger significance of "cultural" and "ideational" factors in the way the behaviour of populations is understood by demographers today, surprisingly little of the theoretical insights or methodologies generated out of cultural studies, for instance, register in contemporary population sciences. A corresponding absence also exists in film studies and, despite its exceptional amenability to cross-disciplinary investigation, cultural studies. While a deliberate figure of "population" has become more pronounced with the increasing prominence of Foucauldian categories of the biopolitical and governmentality, the problems raised and given clarity by these theoretical optics have tended to remain peripheral, if ubiquitously so, to the direct engagement with the aesthetic and symbolic operations of culture, at least insofar as the idea of "population" is concerned. Where this connection has been touched on by others, for instance as I have suggested in Rancière, it has not yet produced a clear, distinct and coherent methodological framework within which other objects might be located. The distinct approaches I take up in this dissertation thus represent, in part, different ways in which a connection that has remained implicit in cultural theory might be given a more definite and applied form.

The three chapters that make up the core of this dissertation also represent an effort to propose a historical narrative that forms, alongside the question of an aesthetic

dimension of demography, or a cine-demography, a constant frame of reference for my analysis. A motif of decline, of the metaphorics of lateness and of images of desertion, stasis and aging reappear in different guises and configurations in each of my chapters, in ways that develop a tentative chronological emplotment of these themes, while at the same time maintaining the specificity of the different spaces and times through which I focus my account. The synchronic structure of distinct moments, or cases grows from my selection of a series of demographic crises, or discourses of demographic crisis around which I have attempted to draw a very partial story of a demographic imagination that would correspond to the history of capitalism since the 1970s. Grounded, quite explicitly, in a materialist conception of the history of culture and form, my experimentation with different ways of exploring the idea of "film populations" and of the confluence of the film and demography as a representational problem is thus focused through a series of distinct cases of the cinematic reflection, refraction or construction of population crisis.

The first chapter centers on the crisis discourse of overpopulation and its representation in American science fiction films of the 1970s. Seeking to situate my study as a whole within a historical and theoretical frame that begins with the 1970s, this first chapter is perhaps the most explicit of the three in developing a periodizing claim. Taking the 1974 (Bucharest) and 1984 (Mexico City) world population conferences as a way of bookending a period of heightened alarm about world population, chapter one works to establish the place of demographic discourse within the more familiar political and economic accounts of the 1970s as the crisis-riven origin of a new period of capitalism (globalized, neoliberal, post-Fordist, "late"). At the same, time, I attempt to demonstrate

the shared project of cinema and demographic discourse that emerges during this moment against the determining backdrop of a radically expanded, global scale of social relations of production. I take the figure of the crowd and its convoluted representation in American science fiction film of the 1970s as a metonymic formulation of population anxieties. The long analysis of the construction of the image of the crowd in *The Omega Man* (Sagal, 1971) at the heart of this chapter, stresses the manner in which attempts to visually capture the popularized threat of the "population bomb" amplifies the contradictions internal to this discourse. More specifically, I argue that the behaviour of science fiction representations of overpopulation also contain their opposite figure, namely the image of total depopulation. In its unlikely fusion of these two images of demographic crisis, *The Omega Man* captures the ideological dysfunction of the popular discourse of overpopulation. Through the distorting geostrategic lens of the Cold War and the eventful resurgence of Malthusian limits in the form of real resource (petroleum) scarcity, the alarmist population discourse of the 1970s provides an allegory of the crisis and transformation of the capitalist world system that rests, among other things, upon a geographical expansion, redistribution and redefinition of social production. In this sense, the story of the proliferation of anxiety about overpopulation during the 1970s is as much a measure of the changed global composition of capital as it is a refraction of Cold War ideological (and reproductive!) warfare, as a reflection of genuine worries about the problems entailed in an increasingly unsustainable (and increasingly legible) "world population." Perhaps more crucially in light of the broader claims of my project, I want to signal the way that, beneath the discursive and visual repetition of the threat of

overpopulation, the demographic imaginary of the 1970s is a projection of fears about the ever *declining* growth of advanced industrial populations.

The second chapter of my dissertation takes up the spectre of decline that appears ambivalently in the crises of the 1970s, looking to the 1990s and the emergence of demographic crisis discourse centering on the post-soviet states of Eastern Europe and the trend toward absolute demographic decline, or depopulation in this region. Here, my exploration of a cinematic dimension of this crisis is moved to the foreground, focusing on films of the Hungarian director Béla Tarr. Tarr's films provide a way of raising a different and more specifically cinematic framework for the aesthetic and representational problem of a cinematic demography. Unlike the analogical approach that I adopt in my first chapter, which posits a certain shared project between cinema and expert demographic discourse, here I read the relationship, in a sense, metaphorically, through the cinematography of slowness that characterize Tarr's film style. Giving precedence to the formal construction of Tarr's films, I ask how the narrative and cinematographic production of slowness in Tarr's films might provide a figuration of the historically unprecedented absolute decline in populations across Eastern Europe. Against an interpretation of the preponderance of extremely long takes in Tarr's later films (*Damnation* [1987], *Satantango* [1994], *The Werckmeister Harmonies* [2000]) in terms of an inheritance of Tarkovsky's spiritualist formalism, I consider the manner in which the problematic of realism offers a means of clarifying what is distinctive in Tarr's film style as well as the way in which an expanded, biopolitical mode of cinematic realism might

offer an alternative route for thinking cinema's response and contribution to the imagination of demographic crisis.

The third and final chapter looks to the emergent demographic trend today toward global population aging. I move away from a strict purview of national/regional cinema, genre or auteur and instead begin with the ideological substrate of a global film industry and the growing prominence of cinematic treatments of retirement and the figure of the pensioner that appears contemporaneous with the establishment of the new networked system of selection and valorization recognizable today in the international film festival. Tracing the wider ambit of the ideological function of the pensioner today, I match the film festival valorization of what I call the cinematic *Vollendungsroman* ("completion" or "winding up" story) with the aging of advanced, Western nations as well as the structural importance of pensions and retirement savings for the expansion of finance capital at the turn of the millennium. An overdetermined point conjoining the economic and the cultural, population aging – once more, today, under the sign of "crisis" – appears in narrative cinema and visual culture through insistent reductions to the level of the subject: the experience of the aging subject appears in isolation, divorced from its constitution within a demographic and economic process.

Taken together, the cinematic representation of overpopulation, population decline and population aging, at first glance, present a discordant arrangement of incompatible situations and subjects. Indeed, the discontinuity and reversal to which the crisis discourse of population has been subject to over the past forty years is perhaps the feature that most recommends this topic. It is the volatility of the idea of a population

crisis over this period that, above all, singles it out as an especially rich field of affective and ideological investment. It is also by virtue of the sheer incompatibility of the objects to which a crisis of population attaches itself that its cultural and aesthetic dimensions become especially illuminating. Here, I will argue, one can discover the spaces within which overpopulation and depopulation are made to cohere, sutured together as part of a larger assemblage. In addition to the demographic sensibilities latent in film (or the filmic sensibility in demographic thinking) that forms the conceptual wager of this dissertation, it is cinema's cultural pre-eminence globally during this period as well as its responsiveness to social contradiction that shapes it as a cipher of late capitalism's population anxieties.

Chapter 1

Seventies Science Fiction Film and the Crisis Logic of Population

In 1974, Kurt Waldheim, then Secretary-General of the United Nations, declared the year to come "World Population Year." The declaration and the ensuing call that nations prepare for the "the broadest and most comprehensive possible plans for participation in the Year's activities" (Waldheim 1) came after years of building pressure from the rapidly growing US "family planning industry" that had by this time become a vital instrument of scientific support for the US policy objectives in the Third World (cf. Connelly; Demeny, "Social Science and Population Policy"; Donaldson). This growing attention paid to the threatening figure of world population from the late 1960s to the early 1970s arguably finds its defining moment at the 1974 Conference on World Population in Bucharest. As Matthew Connelly notes in his recent history of world population control, there was already a certain tension undergirding a world conference flooded with US population control advocates that was taking place in the capital city of the only country in the world with an explicit, target-bound policy for *increasing* its population (74). Bucharest proved well-suited to play host to a watershed moment in the politicization of the idea of world population. In their 1975 review of the outcomes of the Bucharest Conference, Jason Finkle and Barbara Crane write:

> The World Population Conference in Bucharest in August 1974 was the first global conference of official government representatives to confront the highly sensitive question of population and its relationship to development…. Despite the many achievements now claimed for the Conference, one thing that it failed to do was to follow the scenario constructed by its principle organizers. [The North American and Western European delegations] intended the Bucharest Conference

> to consolidate the policy gains that had already been made in…developing countries. […] The nations represented at Bucharest did adopt a Plan of Action by consensus on the final day of the Conference, but it differed in important respects from the Draft Plan and was approved only after intense conflict and difficult negotiations…The impetus to amend the Draft Plan came from several Third World nations…who effectively made the demand for a new economic order a rallying point for other developing nations…. The Draft Plan stressed the need to limit population growth through implementing population and social welfare policies with direct effect on fertility. The final Plan, by contrast, conveyed a strong sense of urgency about the need to accelerate socioeconomic development in general and to bring about a new and more equitable international economic order. (Finkle and Crane 88)

The Bucharest conference, perhaps more than any event of its kind before or since, underscored the extent to which world population had become a crucial, conflicted vector for the formation of an emergent and radically global economic order.

In 1984, a decade after the Bucharest Conference, the next World Population Conference took place in Mexico City. While the political confrontation staged at Bucharest had taken many of the delegates of the advanced capitalist countries by surprise, the compromised Plan of Action the conference produced had little real effect on the continued expansion of the US population control agenda in the Third World.[15] Indeed, over the course of the next decade, many of the world's largest countries of the Third World came not only to accept the population control framework for development promoted by the US delegation to Bucharest, but had undertaken large scale, sometimes terrifying measures to reduce their own population. Given the widespread adoption of the population control framework in the decade following Bucharest, the ideological shift registered in the position of the US delegation to Mexico City in 1984 was perhaps even

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[15] On the relationship between the intellectual development of demographic fertility theory and American foreign policy, see Demeny, "Social Science and Population Policy"; Donaldson; Greenhalgh, "Social Construction"; Hodgson, "Demography as a Social Science"; Hodgson, "Orthodoxy and Revisionism"; Szreter, "The Idea of Demographic Transition".

more unexpected than the 'politicization' of the Bucharest conference. As Peter

Donaldson explains:

> [By 1984,] the developing world had accepted the American analysis of the population problem – that rapid growth was a serious threat to economic development – as well as the US solution to the problem: provide contraceptive services. But the growth of the conservative political and the right-to-life movements in the United States…forced a change in the American position, which again put the United States in opposition to most developing-world representatives, ironically by taking a stand close to what developing countries themselves had argued ten years earlier – namely, that economics was a more important force in the prosperity of developing countries than was the growth of their populations… The US position paper found population growth in the developing world "a challenge," which "provoked an over-reaction by some, largely because it coincided with two negative factors…government control of economies, a pathology which spread throughout the developing world … [and] an outbreak of an anti-intellectualism, which attacked science, technology, and every concept of material progress. (Donaldson 129-130)

Interpreting this apparent about-face, Donaldson and others are right to highlight the

conjuncture of the geopolitical context of the Cold War and the growing political

significance of evangelical, pro-life lobby groups for US domestic politics. Historians of

the environmental movement have in turn pointed to the other side of the political

spectrum and the manner in which population control becomes increasingly and

strategically de-emphasized as a subject among environmental activists. Caught between,

one the one hand, the legacy of an often transparently racist population control campaign

that, by the end of the 1970s had resulted in mass sterilizations in a number of Third

World countries and, on the other, the struggle for reproductive rights for women that

reconfigured the polarities of domestic politics at home, North American and European

environmental activists tended to avoid the topic of population control as simply too

politically and ethically fraught (Buell 143-176; Whitty). If it is at least in part the

dizzying overdetermination of the discourse of population crisis that forces it quietly to the margins of public debate in the West, it is also this accretion of conflicting meanings and legacies that makes it such an intriguing moment to revisit today.[16] Cutting across the political torsions internal to the history of population control, I argue that one way to return to the fascinating reversal of the hegemonic (US) rationality *vis à vis* population control that takes place during the 1970s – a reversal exemplified so starkly at the 1984 World Population Conference – is to read it against the periodization of the political, economic and cultural regime that is widely recognized today as having emerged out of the crises of the 1970s.

Situated within such a conjunctural history of the 1970s, my analysis is built around an effort to outline a cultural symptomology of the specifically demographic register of the crises discourse of this period. I outline, in particular, ways in which popular American cinema, during this moment of broad, systemic crisis of capitalism, reproduces and itself becomes implicated in the complex emergence of a new and threatening idea of world population. While there is no lack of popular cultural articulations of population crisis from this period, I focus especially on the way that popular cinema projects and helps to cement the fears and hopes attached to the figure of world population. The first thread of my argument stretches across two moments in the history of cinematic depictions of crowds and the latent demographic tropologies contained therein: first, in its oft-recognized importance in early cinema's attraction to urban street life, and then in the context of the 1970s and the projection of a pathologized

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[16] For a recent account of the way overpopulation and population control has been excised from public ecological discourse, see Julia Whitty, "Population: The Last Taboo"

image of the crowd in American science fiction film. Reading the depiction of city crowds in terms of a metonymic figuration of anxieties about population, I argue, reveals a polarizing symbolic field shaped around the repetition of images of crowded and vacant city space. This alternation of images of crowded and vacant streets provides a framework for interpreting the preoccupation with imagining demographic catastrophe in the popular science fiction films of the 1970s. The second thread of my argument attempts to periodize this decade in terms of the twinned history of the restructuring of the post-WWII regime of capital accumulation and the construction of popular anxieties about world population crisis. Finally, I turn to a close examination of the 1971 film *The Omega Man* in order to assess the way in which the cinematic depiction of urban crowd is refigured.

Crowding the Scene

At least as early as Siegfried Kracauer's famous quotation of Félix Mesguich, the Lumière brothers' "ace" cameraman, film theory has taken for granted the notion that "the crowd and its eddies" are the true domain of the cinema (Kracauer, *Theory of Film* 31). Though the framework for theorizing the topical affinity of film for the crowd has certainly been revised, challenged and even reversed over the years, the relationship between city space and urban crowds remains a consistent preoccupation for cinema studies – whether aimed at the evolution of film as a medium, as a formal or aesthetic object of theoretical inquiry, perhaps even as a specific phenomenological apprehension of the world. The capacity of moving pictures to capture the press, scale, and speed, as well as mass gestural behaviour constitutes what is perhaps the single most constant

topical preoccupation of early cinema's best-known works, from the Lumière's "Workers Leaving a Factory," to Dziga Vertov's "Kino-Pravda" series, to King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928). For film studies, the lasting importance of Walter Benjamin's elaboration of the relationship between cinema, the modern city and the new productive and perceptual regimes of modernity represents only the most significant of a long line of theories of film that develop around this rich cluster of technical, political and aesthetic associations. Albeit with important variation, this cluster of associations gathers an expanded significance in its reverberations through post-WWII social and political thought, developing a currency far beyond the specific aesthetic, periodizing problem of Benjamin's early formulation. Henri Lefebvre's speculations on space, the Situationists' construction of a post-critical urbanism, the retooling of the Spinozian concept of the multitude in the wake of the alter-globalization movements of the late 1990s, even Jacques Rancière's recent genealogy of the aesthetico-political concept of the "distribution of the sensible": while moving in different, even sometimes antagonistic directions, all address the problem of redefining the political through some projection of a mediated (filmic or otherwise), distinctly urban, crowd.[17]

Turning to contemporary film scholarship, however, it is surprising to find so many edited collections published in the past ten years aimed at redressing the "relatively little theoretical attention […] directed towards understanding the relationship between urban and cinematic space" (Clarke 1); indeed, still less has been directed to the more specific and complex relationship between cinema, city and the crowds that populate,

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[17] Cf. Hardt, and Negri, *Multitude*; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Ranciere*, The Future of the Image*; Ken Knabb. *Situationist International*.

Fig. 2.1 *La Sortie des usines Lumière à Lyon* (1895)

Fig. 2.2 King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928)

produce and consume both. Tony Fitzmaurice remarks at the outset of his collection *Cinema and the City* that "it is, of course, a truism to point out that film is *the* urban cultural form *par excellence*" (Fitzmaurice 19-20); such is the naturalness of this connection that Stanley Cavell needs only a passing, parenthetical sentence to establish "film's natural attraction to crowds" (Cavell 35). The cinema-city-crowd triad appears so fundamental to film theory that David B. Clarke notes:

> whilst the histories of film and the city are imbricated to such an extent that it is unthinkable that the cinema could have developed without the city, and whilst the city has been unmistakably shaped by the cinematic form, neither film nor urban studies has paid the warranted attention to their connection… So central is the city to film that, paradoxically, the widespread *implicit* acceptance of its importance has mitigated against an explicit consideration of its actual significance. (Clarke 2)

While Clarke's identification of the almost stifling consensus concerning the city-cinema connection seems, by and large, accurate, the "explicit consideration of its actual significance" that follows his and others' statements, often does little more than retrace the parameters drawn by Benjamin and the first generation of film's theorists. Are we to assume that a century of quantitative and geographical expansion of urban populations, to say nothing of changes in the modes of its representation in film, have occurred unaccompanied by any qualitative shift in the socio-political semantics or aesthetic construction of the cinematic crowd? And, if such an assumption seems untenable, where can we look to begin to theorize new categories for thinking the cinematic representation of the urban crowd?

In 1925, René Clair directed his first film, a short science fiction comedy entitled *Paris Qui Dort*. The film's story centres on a young man, waking at the top of the Eiffel

Tower, where he works as an over-night watchman, to find the streets of Paris, far below, impossibly silent. The night watchman and Clair's camera descend to the streets below to find the city's population frozen, "asleep" in the midst of their evening activities: couples paralyzed in mid-stride, restaurants and bars filled with dozing customers. Anticipating what would become a stand-by in the B-movies of the 1960s and 1970s, the mystery is solved with the discovery of a mad scientist and his paralyzing ray-gun. The film's denouement returns the city population to life, providing comic resolution as the camera captures the activity of bewildered citizenry, who suddenly wake to find themselves in the middle of their dinner at noon. What is noteworthy about this film is less its anticipation of the death ray as plot-device than its early cinematic presentation of the figure and the fantasy of the emptied city that goes largely unremarked in so many accounts of cinema's long romance with the urban crowd. Indeed, so tied is the received

Fig. 2.3 Sleeping pedestrian in René Clair's *Paris Qui Dort* (1925)

idea of the cinematic city to the dynamism of the urban crowd that to trace the development of the appearance of the emptied city in cinema's early years is almost to begin reconstructing an alternative, parallel history of film's relationship to urban space.

Cinema's early fascination with the city is nowhere more fully expressed than in the great portraits of a city produced by Walter Ruttmann (*Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* [*Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt*], 1927) and Dziga Vertov (*Man with a Movie Camera* [*Chelovek s kino-apparatom*], 1929). Here, the camera seems to perform to perfection a paradigmatically modernist problematic of proximity and distance that Walter Benjamin's famous readings of Poe's "Man in the Crowd" and the political aesthetics of mechanical reproducibility canonized for cultural theory (cf. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* 48, 50, 53-54). Exemplified in the case of Vertov's film, these 'portraits of the city' capture the new capacity of the camera to move with the crowd, mimicking its dynamism and even assuming its perspective upon the sidewalk, following it to work in the morning and home again at night. On the other hand, in a manner typically associated with Ruttmann's *Symphony*, the camera distances itself and is even criticized for its "intoxicat[ation] with geometry," for its distanciation from the crowd and the reifying depiction of a homogenous worker-unit (Gaughan 43-46; cf. Kracauer, *Theory of Film* 182-188). Though the play of proximity and distance seems to me still an indispensible framework for understanding the formal structure of cinema's crowds, in these films these two representational modes finally rest upon a more fundamental and under-theorized negation of the figure of the crowd itself that presents in these early cinematic portraits of the city.

Fig. 2.4 Walter Ruttmann, Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt (1927)

In Ruttmann and Vertov's city films, one also finds the image of the city subtracted from the presence of an urban population. Both films capture this absence in the early morning and late night, the moments of pause and rest in the daily cycle of the reproduction of the industrial city's work force. The filmed image of the empty city signifies, first and foremost, negatively: while the architecture becomes eerily animated and aware in these scenes, the cinematic representation of the vacant city street is necessarily an image of the *absence* of a crowd. It is not difficult to locate the persistence and even hypertrophy of the estranging stillness of the empty city street in later cinema – Michelangelo Antonioni's oeuvre is one outstanding example; yet there is also a parallel, positive content, an excitement that emerges in the cinematic image of the vacant city street. This cinematic rendering of a depopulated city also bears with it the projection of

the architecture of the city space as pure, empty potential. The exuberance of the hero of

Rene Clair's science fiction upon discovering the untended shops and restaurants of the

artificially dormant city begins to suggest the degree to which the pleasure of the

depopulated street is also deeply tied to a radically anti-social, perhaps distinctly

capitalist fantasy of limitless consumption; the spectacle of the post-apocalyptic city, in

this sense, prompts the viewer to fantasize their own shopping-spree, should the

population of their own city suddenly disappear or be wiped out. The pleasure of the

image of the deserted city and its embedded fantasy of free access to consumer goods, to

which I will return in some detail later, is heightened in these early examples by the

dissonance between the pace of the film movement and editing, on the one hand, and the

stillness of the city street. In Ruttmann's *Symphony*, this dissonance is highlighted and to

a certain extent moderated as Ruttmann's camera slows, as if to mimic the drowsiness of

the now-absent crowd, and reveals the wear and texture of windows and curbs.

Something of the ambivalent affect of the cinematic representation of the empty city is

captured in what semiotics calls the zero degree of signification or the zero sign. The

concept of the zero sign focuses a range of problems for linguistics and semiotics that

emerge in the case of a marked absence of signs or signifiers, that signify precisely in

their significant absence. The fascinating affective coherence of the zero sign across sign-

systems is conceptualized in Aristotle's notion of *horror vacui* – "nature abhors a

vacuum" – and repeated in the clichéd phrase "it's quiet…too quiet" (Barthes 77); even

zoo-semioticians have stressed the consistency with which a marked silence or stillness

signals a warning among different species (Sebeok 118). Situated within the cinematic

tradition which expects and assumes the bustling urban crowd, to isolate the capacity of marked silence or stillness to signal an imminent – usually dangerous – event captures, in turn, the full ambivalence of the cinematic image of the empty city; Aristotle's *horror vacui*, after all, identifies the impulse to fill space. Foregrounding the image of the deserted city, then, grants a new complexity and fullness to the function of the urban crowd, putting into relief both the demographic features that make the city recognizable as an aesthetic object and the unstable mixture of pleasure and fear summoned by the visual subtraction of population from this space.

To begin to introduce the demographic register contained within the image of empty urban space is to recognize that while the slow panning shot of the empty, sleeping or early morning street of a city in *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* engenders an unmistakable anticipation of the return of its inhabitants, it also contains the trace of a fear that, maybe this time, the crowds will not arrive. Of course, the constructed image of the empty street is not the experience of an empty street itself and it is the distance between the two that finally interests me here. The space separating an empty city and the *image* of an empty city, which is to say the manner in which the interplay between the *meaningfulness* of an urban mass (or its marked absence) and its visual representation on a screen is the mediating space of the politics of the aesthetic. In this sense, to reconfigure the familiar claim of film's characteristic affinity for the crowd as composed not simply by the presence of mass bodies on the screen, but rather in terms of a dialectic of the presence/absence of bodies is not only to thicken the problem at the level of the aesthetic, but also to introduce new ground for theorizing how cinema's crowds are articulated to

the concrete historical conditions from which and to which they are addressed.

The Seventies, the Crisis and the Problem of Population

To draw out the demographic tropology that operates within this dialectic of the presence/absence of the crowds in early cinema's depiction of urban space, I want to turn to an analogous, polarizing logic of crisis out of which the modern concept of population itself is constituted. As a discursive formation, the modern "problem of population," at least from its first modern formulation during the early period of European industrialization and urbanization, is structured around a magnetic pull between the threatening poles of over- and under-population. While the former threat, overpopulation, is the more familiar demographic figure, what John Maynard Keynes called the *two* Malthusian "devils" of population are conjoined in industrial capital's reliance on the producing and consuming activity of a labouring population for its continuous reproduction.[18] Though these two poles extend logically and analogously from the fundamental limit-cases of capitalist crisis – overproduction and under-consumption – the

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[18] In the context of the eugenics movement and reproductive debates of the interwar years in England, Keynes became among the more notorious economists (quite an achievement) when it came to the "question of population;" over the course of his writing during the 1920s and 1930s, Keynes in fact takes both openly eugenicist and pro-natalist positions over the course of his career. The reference to two Malthusian devils comes from a lecture delivered before the Eugenics Society in 1937, less than a years after the publication of *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. In this short talk, Keynes reverses the target of his earlier published neo-Malthusian alarm about the economic consequences of overpopulation and unchecked population growth with an equally alarmist warning of the dangers of "a too rapidly declining population." Restating a contradiction that Karl Marx had identified in numerous different ways in his critique of political-economy, Keynes warns that having eliminated Malthus' first "devil O" of overpopulation, modern states risked unchaining the "Mathusian devil U" of Underemployed resources and underconsumption, thus threatening growth. The fact that neither of Keynes' urgent calls to action were founded in any credible demographic data makes these statements all the more exemplary and useful for understanding the logic of population crisis endogenous to capitalism. (Keynes, "The Economic Consequences"). For further discussion of the development of Keynes' views, see Peterson, W.; Toye.

relationship of population to a given regime of accumulation is far more flexible than this.[19] This relationship is malleable and impacted on all sides by changes in the organic composition of capital, the evolution of technologies of accumulation, and by the social and cultural constitution of the class at any given moment. It was this recognition that formed the basis of Karl Marx's critique of Thomas Malthus' infamous statement of 'the population problem'. Contra Malthus' transhistorical claims about the "natural inequity of two powers of population and the production of the earth" (Malthus 15), Marx argues that "every specific historic mode of production has its own special laws of population, historically valid within its limits alone. An abstract law of population exists for plants and animals only, and only in so far as man has not interfered with them" (Marx *Capital Volume 1* 612-613).[20] If Marx's critique reminds us to be wary of conceptually-reifying, transhistorical models of "population," he is just as quick to insist upon certain immutable, defining characteristics of a specifically capitalist law of population. Thus, any reading of the crisis discourse of population in the symbolic field must constantly confront the dictum that "an increasing population appears as the basis of accumulation as a continuous process."[21] Reading population as an ideological constellation within any historical conjuncture must undertake *both* the denaturalizing periodization of the 'law of population' in light of cultural context and the changing composition of capital and, on

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[19] Though his own position draws close to a kind of post-Keynesian Malthusian, Joseph J. Spengler's studies of the history of economic thought with respect to the problem of population growth and decline is unparalleled and underlines the doubled crisis logic of capitalism's "law of population" (if stripped of the critical thrust of Marx's original formulation). See in particular, *Population Economics: Selected Essays of Joseph J. Spengler* and *Facing Zero Population Growth*.

[20] For an extended account of the roots and evolution of Marx's critique of Malthus, see Meek, *Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb*.

[21]See also Marx's 1863 notes on "Necessary Conditions for the Accumulation of Capital" in *Theories of Surplus Value*.

the other hand, the synchronic analysis of the continuity of capitalism's imperative of necessary population growth.

An analogon between a dialectic of crowding and emptiness at the level of the symbolic and a dialectic of demographic and economic behaviour at the level of the political-economic provides the starting point for a situated reading of the significance of population anxiety in the systemic crises of the 1970s and the popular cinematic articulations of this anxiety to which I now turn. In what remains, I will focus in on the reconstitution of the visual trope of the crowded and emptied city in the science fiction film of the 1970s. Transposing this visual trope that I have outlined in the context of early cinema onto the years of the 1970s presents evidence of a dramatic, hypertrophic activation of the demographic metaphorics latent in earlier cinematic images of crowded and emptied cities. In the case of the science fiction of the 1970s specifically, this aspect of the depiction of urban space takes on the symptomatic characteristics of the wider crisis – as much symbolic and representational as economic or systemic – that define this moment.

The narrative that is generally accepted among political and economic histories of the past fifty years positions the 1970s as a period of crisis and transition that produced a fundamental shift not only in the organization of the regime of capital accumulation, but perhaps just as decisively at the level of the symbolic, the field of cultural production and political ideation.[22] Typically, this period is dated from the first signs of systemic crisis in

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[22] If with significant variations, this historical interpretation is shared almost universally. My own frame of reference is draws from the analyses of Marxist historians and political economists. See, for example, Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*; Brenner; Duménil and Lévy; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*; Helleiner; Mandel, *Late Capitalism*.

profitability, on the one hand, and the explosion of anti-systemic movements on the other, both of which appear at the tail end of the 1960s. Setting aside the enormous complexity and contention that runs through interpretations of this period, one can summarize matters and say that the 1970s mark the end of a long period of what the French regulation school of economic historians describe as an intensive regime of accumulation that began in the years following the great depression and develops over the interwar period until the late 1960s.[23] Though with significant differences from nation-state to nation-state – a fact that itself is a notable feature of this particular historical systemic crisis of capitalism – this intensive regime of capital accumulation was defined by the use of state-centred, Keynesian fiscal policy (i.e. state spending and taxation) and monetary policy (i.e. strategic manipulation of the money supply) aimed at encouraging aggregate demand (i.e. consumption) in core capitalist countries. As with any transitional crisis between two regimes of accumulation, with the failure of this intensive regime of accumulation, the organic composition of capital and the distribution of labour underwent a violent and comprehensive transformation. And, also typical of such moments of crisis and transition, its causes and effects exceeded existing economic models and controls, overwhelming demarcations of endogenous and exogenous, micro- and macro-, national

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[23] The term "regime of accumulation," describes an the system of social and economic regularities that maintain the relative continuous accumulation ("growth") of capital, by temporarily resolving or deferring the contradictions and disequilibria to which the process inevitably produces. These regularities include a wide and dynamic set of social and economic processes – among them, the organization of production, to the horizon of space-time for the realization of profit, the composition of social demand, the role and articulation of noncapitalist (and anti-captialist) social and economic forms – within the system being described. An "intermediary concept" (Aglietta) between the abstractions of capitalism (or "capital accumulation") as such and the constant concrete revolution of production and social forms, the term attempts to account for the cyclical crisis and reconstitution of capital accumulation (or capitalism) in different concrete form, which evolve and come apart in response to the social and technological organization of production. See Aglietta; Arrighi, "Towards a Theory of Capitalist Crisis"; Boyer 34-37; Lipsietz.

and international; thus, for example, the failure of the demand-side, Keynesian economic compromise of labour and capital 'at home' and the realization of international political pressures on capital from the demands of the quickening colonial national liberation movements in the broader geo-political context of a Cold War struggle for the Third World (cf. Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity* 121-200). Core capitalist national economies found the mechanisms and logics of the existing order incapable of absorbing new pressures and contradictions – above all, falling profitability of US industry in the face of competition of German and Japanese producers and the steadily expanding ambit of international trade and foreign investment – which, in turn, led to instability, rising inflation and unemployment and, finally, prolonged instability and devaluation.

The oil crisis that came to a head in 1973 is generally not seen as a primary determinant of the economic stagnation of the 1970s, but it did punctuate and to a certain extent catalyze the crisis, signalling the new global parameters of economic life in a decisive way and, with its sharp reminder of the material and ecological limits of capitalism, providing a new thematization of old fears surrounding resource scarcity. Anxieties about overpopulation during this period found their special resonance in the context of high unemployment, increasingly unsustainable pressures of international trade and finance and the burgeoning awareness of the ecologies of unfettered capitalist growth, of resource scarcity, energy consumption and pollution.

Under these conditions, it is not surprising that it is during the 1970s that a profusion of anxious images of urban crowds re-emerge with the same sense of urgency that they do in the early cinema of the equally crisis-ridden first decades of the Twentieth

Century. Without reducing things to a matter of economic determinism, the extent to which a preoccupation with crowds coincides with the historical shifts in the scale and organization of capital accumulation forms a compelling historical linkage between the cinematic image of the urban crowd during these two periods. By the 1970s, the relay between economic transformations and their mediation in popular culture is far tighter and more responsive than was case with the early medium cinema; this changed technological capacity at the level of media contributes enormously to the capacity of cinema to reflect, reproduce and mediate contemporary social contradictions. Though still prior to VHS and home video, cinema-goers of 1970 brought with them a set of preformed visual cues, competencies and syntagmatic connections that were tele-visually updated on a daily basis. No doubt it is also due in part to cinema's heightened sensitivity to the expanded phenomenological scale of social and economic life, that the systemic crisis of the 1970s – the first globally televised crisis of capitalism – also appears more conflicted, confusing and disparate at the level of its symbolic articulations.[24]

By the beginning of the 1970s, it is possible to identify the emergence of a properly global and unprecedentedly *popular* self-consciousness of world population. Without ignoring many earlier conceptions and even calculations of a total human population, before this period, this knowledge had never been shaped by a truly popular identification, however ambivalent, with a mass demographic unit that exceeded and incorporated familiar national optics of population. New insecurities about the global scale of resource acquisition that came with the oil crisis, the rising commodity prices of

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[24] The broader cultural effects of these changes in late capitalist culture are famously elaborated in Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism*, see especially 48-54, 408-417.

the 1970s as well as the reappearance, in an emergent post-industrial and globalized form, of what Marx calls the "relative surplus population" in both rising unemployment (particularly in the United States) and the new spectre of untapped planetary reserve of labour in 'developing' nations: all these played a role in reshaping old anxieties about population in popular consciousness and culture. In this sense, a demographic vector must be added to the formation of what Immanuel Wallerstein calls geoculture, the cultural or cognitive dimension of globalization that Wallerstein connects with the "world revolution" of 1968 (Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture* 184-200). The growth of a mass ecological movement during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s is perhaps the most significant contributor to the popular dissemination and identification with a world population. The production and mass appeal of well-known reports like *The Limits to Growth* and bestsellers such as Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, as I will discuss further in a moment, articulated a specifically demographic cause for alarm to a wider, growing popular movement that rested on the uncertainty of a common ecological future. As Andrew Ross notes, the effect of "focus[ing] public awareness on the international dimension of ecological crisis" was as pervasive as it was ambivalent in its effects. On the one hand, according to Ross, the spectre of overpopulation and ecological catastrophe "signals that globalism, as an everyday idea, has finally broken the surface of popular political consciousness, so long bound by short-term interests and nationalistic anxieties or desires. (Ross 188). On the other hand, a new globalism in popular political consciousness was accompanied not only by a increasingly totalizing escalation of financial capital, but also by the development of new bodies and technologies of

"planetary management" – i.e. the World Bank, the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), the International Development Association, and so on (ibid. 179-185).

If the 1970s marks the popularization of a consciousness of, and anxious identification with, an idea of world population, its first popular articulation can be said to come not from cinema, but in a outpouring of best-selling 'non-fiction' predicting a coming crisis of over-population, food and resource scarcity that appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[25] Undoubtedly the most recognizable and influential of the popular accounts of the "population explosion," Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* had, in the first four years following its publication in 1968, gone through 22 printings and sold over two million copies.[26] Together with the Club of Rome's *The Limits of Growth* (1972), Ehrlich's book managed to repackage a Malthusian fear about the rate of growth of the working poor, refracting this old worry through a new ecological consciousness and the multifarious crisis of the capitalist world system.[27] Some of the

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[25] The bibliography here is extensive and varied; the spike in publication is as apparent among scholarly presses as it is among popular, 'best-sellers,' policy papers and even elementary school text books. An illustrative sample popular titles includes Sax, *Standing Room Only: The World's Exploding Population* (1960); Vogt, *People! The Challenge to Survival* (1961); Day, *Too Many Americans!* (1965); Paddock, *Hungary Nations* (1966); Paddock, *Famine 1975! America's Decision: Who Will Survive?* (1967); Tydings, *Born to Starve: Is it Too Late to Help Millions of People Doomed to Live in Poverty Hunger and Despair?* (1970); Parsons, *Population Versus Liberty* (1971); Borgstrom, *The Hungry Planet: The Modern World at the Edge of Famine* (1972). Some of these titles, for example *Famine 1975!*, sold almost as well as Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*. One of the more remarkable records of these publications is a series of textbooks assembled by the Washington-based Population Reference Bureau; the series, all published in 1971, includes *People!* (grade 7-9), *The Population Dilemma* (grades 10-12) and *This Crowded World: An Introduction to the Study of Population.* As a addendum to this list, it is worth pointing out that Alfred Sauvy's *Zero Growth* (1976) and Joseph Spengler's *Facing Zero Population Growth: Reactions and Interpretations, Past and Present* (1978), both created stirs and sold well, warning of the problems raised by sub-replacement total fertility rates that by then existed in a number of advanced capitalist nations.

[26] On the history of Ehrlich's reception in the popular press, see also: Connelly 256-260; Wilmoth Patrick Ball.

[27] While there seems to be very little existent work that has quantified the extent of the rise in public interest in population questions over the 1960s and 1970s, some studies have been done on the American context in particular. See, for example, Grammich, Vanzo and Stewart; Schindlmayer.

ideological work that the popularization of the spectre of the exploding populations of the third-world began to assume in the face of the globalization of labour is made almost painfully clear in the personal anecdote from the author that forms the preface of *The Population Bomb*. Ehrlich describes his experience "one stinking hot night in Delhi:"

> My wife and daughter and I were returning to our hotel in an ancient taxi. The seats were hopping with fleas. The only functional gear was third. As we crawled through the city, we entered a crowded slum area. The temperature was well over 100, and the air was a haze of dust and smoke. The streets seemed alive with people. People eating, people washing, people sleeping. People visiting, arguing and screaming. People thrusting their hands through the taxi window, begging. People defecating and urinating. People clinging to buses. People herding animals. People, people, people, people. As we moved through the mob, hand horn squawking, the dust, noise, heat, and cooking fires gave the scene a hellish aspect. Would we ever get to our hotel? All three of us were, frankly, frightened. It seemed that anything could happen – but, of course, nothing did. Old India hands will laugh at our reaction. We were just some over-privileged tourists, unaccustomed to the sights and sounds of India. Perhaps, but the problems of Delhi and Calcutta are our problems too. Americans have helped to create them; we help to prevent their solution. We must all learn to identify with the plight of our less fortunate fellows…if we are to help both them and ourselves survive. (Ehrlich 2)

Despite the somewhat clumsy reflexive afterthought in these last sentences and the text's substantial condemnation of the unsustainable consumption of "over-developed countries," it is the dangerous proximity – economic, political, epidemiological – of a racialized population of Indian bodies that energizes Ehrlich's argument. What is decisively present here is the construction of the groundwork for a popular identification with or, in the case of its European-North American readership, against the threat of a world population. The overextension of resources that Malthus promised at the national level is here projected to the scale of the global in a way that compels the reader to see the growth of a Nigerian family as a threat to America's future source of food or fuel.

Indeed, at the time of his visit in 1966, the image of the teeming city in Ehrlich's anecdote was far less descriptive of Delhi – a city no more densely populated at the time than New York City – than of the fantasy of pre-existing racial discourse of the "urban problem" that had given new prominence after Daniel Patrick *Moynihan's* infamous 1965 report, "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action" that, among other things, focused racist attention on the disproportionate growth of the (sociologically "pathological") African American population living in US urban centres. The extent to which the juridical adoption of racial populations in American domestic policy discourse dovetails with the wider political context of the cold war and the "family planning industry" is well documented and, as I will address later, provides a key framework for understanding the tone, function and ideological significance of popular cultural articulations of population crisis over this period.[28]

While it is possible and, indeed, all too easy to dismiss *The Population Bomb* as yet another iteration of the same Malthusian alarmism that runs throughout the history of capitalism, there is more going on here. What is perhaps most distinctive about Ehrlich's book in the long tradition of demographic alarmism is its astonishingly naïve treatment of the economic consequences of population growth.[29] In the lonely page and a half in *The Population Bomb* that are devoted to the economic consequences of global population growth, Ehrlich is by all appearances oblivious to both the economic beginnings of the Malthusian corpse that he is reanimating and to the deep structural function that

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[28] On co-evolution of foreign and domestic population control objectives in US history, see in particular Connelly 236-275; Donaldson..

[29] This should not be taken to describe Ehrlich's writing elsewhere on this subject.

population growth plays for capital accumulation, to say nothing of the ideological divisions that were cohering around the concept of 'development' and dependency even as he wrote *The Population Bomb*. For Ehrlich, the "economic" consequences of overpopulation are reducible to a moral failure of 'big business;' if corporations irresponsibly encourage rising fertility, Ehrlich argues, it is in order to profit by the higher cost of diapers. The fact is that even at the end of the 1970s, the ideological parameters for projecting the future, or indeed the present of capitalism and the economic consequence of population growth, were not readily available. The ecological movement for which Ehrlich was a pioneering figure was certainly not oblivious to the relationship between unrestrained growth of a consumer capitalism and ecological deterioration. Projects such as the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (1974) and the Carter administration's *Year 2000* (1980) are examples of relatively sophisticated attempts to correlate a multiplicity of trends and indicators in order to project a global future of population growth, resource scarcity, economic growth, technological development and even new quotients like "quality of life." Read against the crisis of capital from the late 1960s and through the 1970s, *The Population Bomb*, despite standing as an exemplary and immensely influential contribution to the production of a genuinely popular consciousness of world population, seem curiously out-of-sync with the emergent logic of capital.

In his 1972 analysis of the economic crises and transformations of the late 1960s, Ernest Mandel argued that late capitalism, as he famously named the coming epoch, "cannot avoid a period of relatively decelerated economic expansion if it fails to break

the resistance of wage-earners and so to achieve a new radical increase in [profitability]…The extension of the industrial reserve army has consequently today become a conscious instrument of economic policy in the service of capital" (112). Mandel was one of the first to diagnose the emergence of a new, "post-industrial" mode of production, a classically Marxian account of a technology-driven transformation of the organic composition of capital, complete with the invention of a new (international) pool of reserve labour. Numerous subsequent critical accounts have consistently highlighted the need for a re-evaluation of Marx's concept of "surplus population" in light of the changed spaces and technologies of capital accumulation that arise out of the crises of the long 1970s. Mike Davis, David Harvey and Zygmunt Bauman, to name a few, have each pointed to the manner in Marx's analysis of the structural necessity of a growing surplus population of unproductive labour for the continuous reproduction of capital reappears out of the crisis of the intensive regime of the mid-twentieth century with a new relevance (Bauman 1-8, 34-62; Davis; Harvey, "Accumulation by Dispossession"). The failing profitability of industrial production among advanced capitalist states, combined with the vulnerability of Third World nations incapable of meeting foreign debt obligations in the midst of the shocks and prolonged volatility of the world market, gave birth to mechanisms – for instance the notorious "Structural Adjustment Programs" of the International Monetary Fund – of what David Harvey describes as "accumulation by dispossession". Simultaneously enabling and enabled by the new transnational mobility of capital and the precipitous growth of financial speculation in the decades that followed, the new face of uneven development following the crises of the 1970s also

produced among the most stark examples of a fundamental change in the classical

relationship between population growth and production that Marx's analysis of the

capitalist law of population addresses itself. Mike Davis, in his *Planet of Slums*, claims

that "the dynamics of Third World urbanization both recapitulate and confound the

precedents of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe and North America" (Davis

11). He continues:

> Eighty percent of Marx's industrial proletariat now lives in China or somewhere
> outside of Western Europe and the United States. Since the mid-1980s, the great
> industrial cities of the South – Bombay, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Belo
> Horizonte, and São Paulo – have all suffered massive plant closures and
> tendential deindustrialization. Elsewhere, urbanization has been more radically
> decoupled from industrialization, even from development *per se*…The size of a
> city's economy, as a result, often bears surprisingly little relationship to its
> population size, and vice versa…In African, Latin America, the Middle-East and
> much of South Asia, urbanization without growth is the legacy of a global
> political conjuncture – the worldwide debt crisis of the late 1970s and the
> subsequent IMF-led restructuring of Third World economies in the 1980s. (ibid.
> 13-14)

While Davis directs his analysis through the particular problematic of urbanization, the

broader point which suggests a decisive shift in the relationship of population growth,

industrialization or industrial production and the larger development of the world

economy recommends a way of fixing the periodicity of the 1970s popular alarmist

discourses of overpopulation. If, as Davis's argument suggests, the unemployed 'surplus'

population of the Third World appears from the 1970s on as increasingly de-linked from

the reproduction of capital, then the about-face in the position of the US delegation to the

1984 World Population Conference in Mexico City, which marks the end of the period I

wish to examine in this chapter, appears as the brutal calculation of an economic

rationality that recognizes not merely the superfluity, but the negligibility and even

disposability of the same population that ten years earlier was proclaimed the primary threat to future political stability and economic prosperity.[30]

The popular cultural expressions of anxiety about overpopulation are fixed firmly in the interregnum between two regimes of capital accumulation that, in turn, suggest two separate regimes, or logics of population. The field of popular cinema, to which I will turn in a moment, provides a remarkably condensed enunciation of the overlapping conjuncture of distinct systems of images, codes and economies of desire through which the broader historical transformations I have outlined are mediated and meaningfully organized. Under the pressure of the reorganization of production and mechanics of capital accumulation as well as the expanded optics of a world population of labouring and consuming bodies, the demographic tropologies of early cinema's cities return in new and monstrous forms.

Projecting Demographic Apocalypse: *The Omega Man*

The outpouring of popular science fiction film in the 1970s is among the most concentrated cultural expressions of popular anxieties about population. Dystopian futures projected in films such as *ZPG*: *Zero Population Growth* (Michael Campus,

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[30] Writing more recently, of the new consistency of sovereignty on the African continent in particular, Achille Mbembe argues:

> Correlated to the new geography of resource extraction is the emergence of an unprecedented form of governmentality that consists in the *management of the multitude*. The extraction and looting of natural resources by war machines goes hand in hand with brutal attempts to immobilize and spatially fix whole categories of people or, paradoxically, to unleash them , to force them to scatter over broad areas no longer contained by the boundaries of a territorial state...If power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the 'massacre.'" (Mbembe 12-13)

1972) and *Soylent Green* (Richard Fleischer, 1973) emerge out of a popular demographic imagination, tapping an ambivalent and elusive pleasure rooted in some way in the perceived inevitability of their nightmarish futures. The image of Charlton Heston's character in *Soylent Green* matter-of-factly picking his way across floors and streets

Fig. 2.5 Charlton Heston makes his way up a staircase of sleeping bodies in *Soylent Green*

carpeted with loitering, sleeping, unproductive bodies captures a fear that, while less spectacular than the infamous cannibal punch-line of the film ("Soylent Green is people!"), captures a deeper, dull horror and fascination with the quotidian experience of overpopulation and resource scarcity. Dystopian eugenic fantasies like *ZPG*, *Zardoz* (John Boorman, 1974) and *Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976) arouse the same anxious pleasure in different ways, but all function through essentially the same ideological ruse, wherein the apparent source of terror, abiding in the representation of a forced rationalization of reproduction, is energized by what is in fact a more terrifying prospect, not of the supposed break with the freedom that the films' audiences enjoy, but of the projected continuity of that order.

The cult British television series *Survivors* (BBC, 1974-1976) provides the

supreme example from this period of the way in which the same projective impulse, when fed through the volatile filter of a demographic fantasy of crisis, leads as quickly to what appears as the opposing fantasy of disaster. In *Survivors*, the sudden and random – though, implicitly, Cold-War inflected – appearance of a global flu pandemic leaves all but a handful of the world's population dead. The series follows a group of British survivors, left to recycle, reuse and attempt to reincorporate the artefacts of a hyper-specialized society that, with the sudden disappearance of knowledge and infrastructure, appear to them as almost alien technology. Set against the possibly more recognizable dystopian fantasies of over-population, *Survivors* presents a fantastic projection of immanent *depopulation,* registering an opposing form of demographic fantasy that is firmly situated within the dialectic of the presence and absence of cinema's crowds with which I began. The demographic fantasy of disaster that is present everywhere in the popular science fiction of the 1970s, precisely in its alternation between the projections of *both* overpopulation and depopulation, shot through with an insoluble mixture of fear, desire and eschatological sublimity, reflects the volatility of a popular demographic imaginary that develops within the dominant and institutional certainties – however alarmist – of overpopulation.

Richard Matheson's 1954 novel, *I am Legend* and its various film adaptations provide a fascinating set of cultural expressions of a fusion of the apparently opposing fears of overpopulation and depopulation. The titles of the two film adaptations that I want to examine in detail, *The Last Man on Earth* (Ubaldo Ragona, 1964) and *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971), announce their place within the tradition of the

narrative genre of 'last man' stories. Perhaps best understood as a sub-genre of post-apocalyptic literature, the generic conceit of the 'last man on earth' story has yet to receive the critical attention it warrants.[31] While castaway stories such as *Robinson Crusoe* appear to provide something of a precursor to the conceit of the 'last man on earth,' the 'last man' story is in a number of ways distinct. The specificity of the last man on earth story is already apparent in what is perhaps the first formulation of the narrative conceit (and one of the earliest examples of the science fiction novel) in Mary Shelley's 1826 novel, *The Last Man*.[32] Set in the late twenty-first century, Shelley's novel imagines the final years of humanity, brought to the brink of extinction after the spread of a supernatural plague that leaves only the narrator, Lionel Verney. Three motifs or features of Shelly's novel are worth highlighting. First, at the level of the narrative, Shelley's story combines a first person narration and an overarching analeptic narrative discourse, in which the narrator, "the last man," reflects back upon the events leading to his present condition. In this, the story borrows from castaway stories such as *Robinson Crusoe*, but reverses many of its conceits: unlike the memoirs of a rescued castaway, the last man story typically follows the narrator's tale with the certainty not that the protagonist will finally return to the fold of society, but rather that all the characters must die before the story reaches its conclusion. Second, the events of Shelley's story cross continents, touching in an astonishingly contemporary way upon problems of immigration and exile. This planetary scale of *The Last Man* seems to mark another generic trait of the 'last

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[31] For an extensive bibliography of novels, television series and films that fall under the category see Clute and Nicholls.

[32] There exists a more specific body of scholarship on the generic innovations of Shelley's novel and its contribution to "last man" texts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. See, for example, Paley; Cantor.

man' story. This aspect of the story and its generic specificity is, in fact, given explicitly

by Shelley's narrator upon realization of his total solitude:

> What a pitiable, forlorn, disconsolate being I was! […] For a moment I compared myself to that monarch of the waste – Robinson Crusoe… Yet he was far happier than I: for he could hope, nor hope in vain – the destined vessel at last arrived, to bear him to countrymen and kindred… He knew that, beyond the ocean which begirt his lonely island, thousands lived whom the sun enlightened when it shone also on him: beneath the meridian sun and visiting moon, I alone bore human features; I alone could give articulation to thought; and, when I slept, both day and night were unbeheld of any… I knew that I, the offspring of man, during long years one among many – now remained the sole survivor of my species. (Shelley 357-358)

The distinction outlined in this curious meta-narratorial comment is a simple one, but

crucial to grasping the specificity and the historical significance of the generic conceit of

the last man. The last man is never the last Frenchman, nor the last German; rather, the

distinctive condition of the genre assumes a capacity to imagine plot and character at the

scale of species. The significance of the epidemiological plot device – another feature

that may be attributable to the sub-genre – while underlining the extent to which the

fantasy of the last man fits neatly alongside the Foucauldian genealogy of biopower, must

be considered in terms of the way that the last man's experience of an essentially

biological condition (extinction) remains articulated in terms of the experience of space

and sociality (or the absence thereof). The specific mode of reflection on solitude in *The*

Last Man mixes the existential terror so apparent in this passage with a peculiar glee at

the sudden disappearance of competition and the absolute availability of the resources of

a depopulated world. The wonder and excitement of the last man at the ready abundance

of abandoned stores and granaries is present in a way that already anticipates the full-

blown capitalist fantasy of unlimited consumption that is repeated in the spectacle of the

abandoned, post-apocalyptic shopping mall in 1960s and 70s science fiction. It is in this sense that the generic conceit of the 'last man' can be read as articulating political allegory through a specifically demographic tropology, recasting, in narrative form, the polarity of the presence and absence of the urban crowd, at the level of the image, as I have outlined above.

The films adapted from Matheson's *I am Legend* provide an intriguing case of the 'last man' story. What distinguishes these films among iterations of the 'last man' story and positions them as exemplary cases of the popular cinematic projections of demographic disaster is the manner in which they manage to contain within the story of the last man on earth its generic opposite: namely, the familiarly modern figure of the pressing, threatening crowd. The first adaptation of Matheson's novel, 1964's *The Last Man on Earth*, is perhaps most faithful to Matheson's source story. Its careful narration of the daily routine of Robert Neville, the eponymous 'last man,' his provision of electricity, food and his ceaseless labour of fighting the "vampires" that are born of a viral infection that has at once depopulated the earth and filled it to bursting with the groaning, nocturnal, mass of creatures bent on making Neville one of their own are all drawn unaltered from Matheson's novel. *The Last Man on Earth* also follows Matheson's novel in its presentation of a complexly variegated typology of different classes of 'infected' vampire: some 'infected' but living, some (un)dead but animated through the presence of the virus and, in the final stage of the film, the third cohort of the 'infected,' who have learned to treat and repress the symptoms. Like *Survivors*, Matheson's story and this first filmed adaptation fixate on the practical: the daily routine of subsistence and

security, but also the sometimes confusing, pseudo-scientific cataloguing of classes and types of the "infected." Indeed, one of the ways in which the various adaptations of Matheson's story can be charted historically – in addition to *The Omega Man*, there is *I Am Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007) and, more tenuously related, *28 Day's Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002) – is in terms of the gradual waning of both the narrative's interest in the practical routine of Neville and the variegated complexity of the vampire horde; by 2007's *I Am Legend*, the vampires have devolved into an indistinguishable, mindless horde of screeching mutants.

The Omega Man abandons the complex, even confused differentiation of the vampire hosts that exists in Matheson's novel and in the earlier *The Last Man on Earth*, at the same time that it redoubles the narrative's effort to construct a meta-diegetic code through which its own events are to be understood politically. Rather than the variegated vampire classes that are shown in *Last Man* – composed of the lurching undead, the still-living "infected," and the new society of the "cured" – *The Omega Man* reimagines the vampires as a single, hooded group defined as much by their ideological affiliation as their monstrosity: no longer lurching and groaning, but articulate, calculating and organized. The vampires of *The Omega Man*, or 'The Family', as they call themselves, are now become devotees of a neo-luddite cult led by a newscaster-turned-evangelist. Unlike all other treatments of the story, the vampires of *The Omega Man* have lost none of their dexterity or language as a result of their infection; their disease brings with it only an aversion to sun, the whitening of their hair and irises, and an apparently instantaneous, pathological susceptibility to their leader's suggestion. Particularly when set against the

solitary, combative, chauvinist independence of Charlton Heston's scowling, anti-social and trigger-happy interpretation of the character of Robert Neville, *The Omega Man*'s 'vampires' are also marked by their relative sociality and organization. Here, and particularly in the derogatory, pathologized figure of collectivity that they represent, are the first indications of the mapping of the ideological coordinates of the Cold War onto the story; the book-burning, anti-modernism and cultish collectivism of 'the Family' provides a blunt figuration of Sovietization.

Fig. 2.6 *The Omeaga Man*: Lisa (Rosalind Cash) "shopping" in an abandoned Pharmacy. A faded sign on the wall reads "Planned Parenthood Supplies."

The luddism of 'The Family' attempts to fill in a sort of ideological vacuum that is put into relief when contrasted with the earlier 1964 adaptation of the story, which, apart from an oblique reference to early 1960s youth culture, provides no historical or political referent upon which to anchor the allegorical code of the story. *The Omega Man*'s attempts to inject Matheson's story with the specific coordinates of race in 1970s United States further strengthens evidence of this marked attempt to provide explicit allegorical signposts. Running throughout the film, the explicit reference to US racial

politics emerges at the beginning of the film, as one black member of the vampire crowd describes Neville's apartment as a "honky paradise," only to be chastened: "Forget your old ways, brother. All your old hatreds, all your old pains: forget. And remember, the family is one." If 'The Family' represents an oddly sinister mixture of a post-racial anti-modernism (as well as a projection of a particular moment in a specifically American story of race and urbanism, of white flight[33]), with the emergence of the film's third faction – another group of survivors, only partially immune to "infection" and surviving outside the city – the film's attempt to shape the referent of its own allegorical content assumes a different form, expanding the figurative content of the film and locating the initial allegory of race on yet another referential axis.

The introduction of a third faction of characters into the plot presents a curious revision of Matheson's story as geopolitical allegory; despite or even because of its transparency, this overlay is important to unpack. The third faction of *The Omega Man* enters from a spatial periphery of the story into the central, urban conflict between Neville and 'The Family.' This third faction replaces and recodes a very different 'treated' faction in Matheson's novel and of *The Last Man on Earth*. By contrast, in *The Omega Man*, the development of the third, peripheral cohort of characters into an

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[33] White flight describes the process of demographic transformation of many urban centers, particularly in the Northern United States, beginning in the 1950s. In large part a mass racist response to the enormous movement of African Americans to the Northern cities following the Second World War, the redistribution of urban space according to race was also fuelled by the government subsidized growth of suburbs that worked in collusion with a post-war ideology of house ownership among the rapidly growing white, middle-class in American cities. The implications of this process have been lasting and the fears and antagonisms that contributed to what is now called white flight were still fresh in the 1970s. In addition to housing, education has represented a specially charged vector within this history of post-war (sub) urbanization. In during the early 1970s, court rulings led to the "forced" racial integration of public schools by bussing students from other districts to *de facto* segregated white schools in a number of cities. The conflict, sometimes violent as in the case of Boston, put the issue of white flight firmly back in the spotlight of the American political consciousness.

allegorical figure of the Third World is, on the whole, unambiguous. Lisa, the leader of the survivors, has clearly been modeled on Angela Davis and the group she leads is largely essentially a multi-ethnic community of children. The scene of Neville's first encounter with this third group is exemplary.

Arriving from the city on a motorcycle, Neville dismounts before what vaguely resembles a Caribbean or Latin American mountain structure, set in thick vegetation; the following shot focuses upon a young, East-Asian boy, crouching behind a mounted and camouflaged machine gun, who waits for Lisa's assurance: "It's okay, Tommy. This is the man. And I mean THE MAN." These details of *The Omega Man*'s adaptation reveal the sensitivity, if not subtlety, with which the plot registers deep transformations in the parameters of the political: on the one hand, the specifically (white) American anxieties about the racialization of urban space, conjured by the siege of the last, *white* man in his townhouse and, on the other, with the insurgence of a figural third world, the dizzying expansion of the phenomenological scale – in short, the globalization of the experience of the political.[34] What is perhaps uniquely available in *The Omega Man* is the suturing of these two complementary modes or scales of an essentially demographic anxiety: on the one hand, the fear of Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb*, combining an old Malthusian narrative with the dizzying expansion of scale of social and economic life and, on the other hand, the concomitant torsions "at home," in the West, the urgency of social antagonisms of race, class and competing age cohorts energized by the rising

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[34] See Larrieux, 84-140. For a fine institutional history of white flight in US cities, see Kruse. On the more specific location of domestic politics of race and city space in relation to international population control advocacy, see Connelly 253-256.

unemployment and the televised shock of gas-station queues. When fused with the demographic allegory embedded in the last man story, *The Omega Man*'s continuous production of new, implicitly or explicitly threatening, figures of the crowd forms a complex syncretic representation of popular population anxieties situated firmly within the broader political-economic crisis and pointing to the specificity of the ideological operations of demographic discourse.

Fig 2.7 *The Omega Man*: Uninfected survivors as *foquiste* cadre.

The Omega Man offers a fascinating case through which to theorize the popular cultural articulation of demographic anxieties that appear in different, often contradictory

forms during the 1970s. What is striking about the elements of *The Omega Man* highlighted here is the extent to which the alternation of the absence of presence of the urban crowd that I have developed throughout this paper is supplemented with the profusion of new codes and allegorical reference which, as I've tried to suggest, differentiates *The Omega Man* from Matheson's story and its other filmed adaptations. In all adaptations of Matheson's story, the stark contrast of the day's abandoned city streets and the night's threatening gmass provides a rhythm to events, alternating between two equally pathologized images of the city population. Each of the *Legend* films opens with a long montage of shots of recognizably urban sites, emptied, abandoned and decorated with the gradually more explicit signs of disaster: cars on sidewalks, swinging shop doors, motionless streets and the slow introduction of bodies strewn in parking lots and stairways. Bearing with it a sinister echo of Rene Clair's frozen citizens and all the ambivalent associations of the emptied cinematic city, the image of the city in the *Legend* films is defined visually in terms of the presence/absence of an urban population. The appearance of crowds by night completes the reversal of the expected behaviour of urban populations and the time of production and reproduction. The doubled, uncanny images of the city that are produced in this reversal are not static, but recurrent elements in a diegetic space and time. The oscillation between these two images of the city in time - the vacant city by day which opens the film and the threatening urban crowd by night – acts as a kind of motor propelling the pace of events forward through the constant threat that Neville will be caught napping at night, or that the monstrous crowd will appear on the street by day. While Neville's constant fear of being caught out after dark appears as the
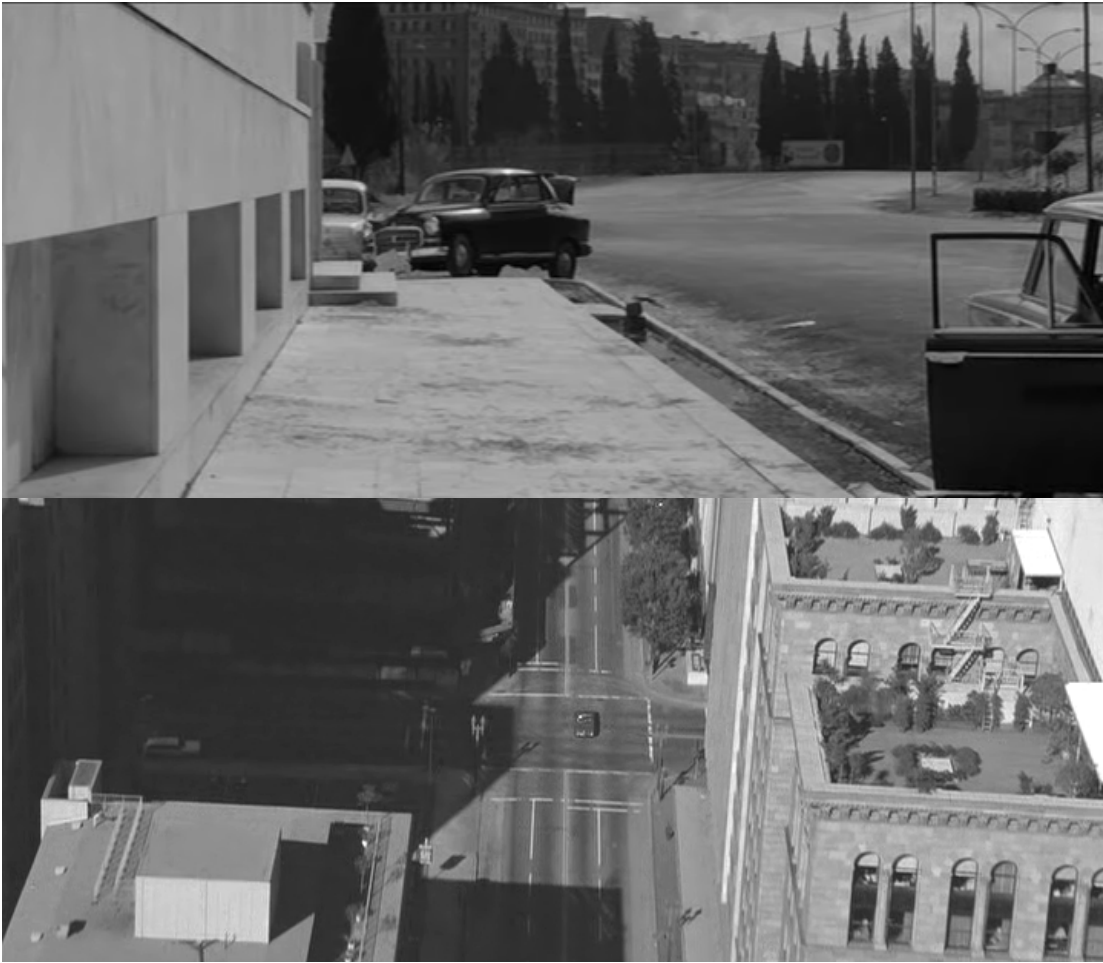
Fig 2.8 Images of the post-apocalyptic city in *The Last Man on Earth* (Top) and *The Omega Man* (Bottom).

primary source of suspense in Matheson's novel, it is the rare appearances of another human during Neville's solitary daytime wandering that mark the intensities of shock, fear and violence in the films. This reversal of the expected rhythm of the city population marks the elementary sign of the crisis logic that structures the film. The expected image regime of the modern city and the regime of population and production that it supports are projected here in a confused, monstrous form that marks not only the overdetermined bodies of the "infected" crowd, but also the space and time of the urban environment itself.

A Time of Monsters

What finally interests me about *The Omega Man* is the relationship between the two elements of the film that I have highlighted: on the one hand, the operation of threatening images of the population of the city and, on the other hand, the continuous profusion of political referents or codes that distinguishes *The Omega Man*'s treatment of Matheson's story. *The Omega Man* is distinguished among the *Legend* films by how explicitly it activates the expectation of a political or ideological referent of the story. Indeed, the narrative's drive to provide the expected political subtext seems to come unbound, reaching an almost desperate pitch with the introduction of layer upon layer of allegory and new political referent. The explicit (if incoherent) racial coding of the vampire host, the peculiar neo-luddite, anti-modern rhetoric of "The Family," the stark portrayal of the pathology of collectivism, the introduction of a figurative Third-World, even the clichéd Christian iconography of Neville's sacrifice at the end of the film: taken together, this almost absurd profusion of political referents suggests, precisely in its inchoate multiplicity, the concerted investment of the film in a sort of strategy of referential excess. Amidst or beneath this profusion of codes is, as I've tried to suggest, a steady rhythm of the depiction of the crowding and vacancy of urban space that functions at every point to suture together an otherwise disorganized assemblage of ideological referents to a familiar and essentially demographic figurative system.

To diagnose the specificity of *The Omega Man* as symbolic act and its significance for the broader problem of periodizing the discourse of population crisis specific to the 1970s begins with the film's narrative content and its adaptation of

Matheson's story. The historical location of *The Omega Man* and its coincidence with a moment of global crisis and recomposition of capitalism is perhaps nowhere as evident as it is in the film's overproduction of recognizable hermeneutic codes. The ideological operation of a mass cultural artefact is always a negotiation of wish-fulfillment and the re-affirmation of the limits of cognition and symbolization, "a kind of psychic compromise or horse-trading, which strategically arouses fantasy content within careful symbolic containment structures" (Jameson, *Signatures* 24). It is on these terms that the visual and narrative construction of population anxiety in this moment must be approached. At the most basic level, the ideological aspect of a period of crisis is characterized by the degree to which recognizable coordinates of desire and the means of capturing, containing and directing its symbolic projection become estranged, illegible and misaligned. The appearance of an excess of social and political referents in *The Omega Man* is symptomatic in the first place of the dizzying expansion of the geopolitical orbit of capital, of a new sense of the global and the new distribution of labour that these usher in.

Yet, as I've tried to show, *The Omega Man* exemplifies a more specific break-down of the available codes for making *population* politically legible, both as a propagandistic object for manipulating nationalist and racist sentiment, but also as a mode of figuring the mass body of labour-as-population. The demographic tropology implicit in early cinema of the metropolitan crowd that crystallizes the aesthetic object of this earlier imagining of population returns confusedly in the 1970s, filtered, above all, through the knowledge that the population growth is something that is now happening

elsewhere. The desperate attempt to articulate this new, expanded demographic awareness motivates a profusion of codes that are uneasily mapped upon the monstrous crowds in *The Omega Man*, which themselves appear and disappear in an attempt to fuse, through this rhythmic repetition of the crowding and desertion of the cityscape, an synthetic image of an ascendant regime of accumulation underwritten by the stubborn persistence of an increasingly incompatible, industrial mode of reproduction and demographic imaginary. Under these conditions, Antonio Gramsci's famous dictum that "the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born," is perhaps subject to a subtle adjustment, where one can say of the ideological torsions of the 1970s that everywhere the new is being born, but the old cannot die (Gramsci 261). This, the interregnum between modes of accumulation and hegemonic regimes, Gramsci writes, is the time of "the surfacing of monsters."[35] The discourse of over-population in the 1970s emerges in such a time of interregnum and its aesthetic representations display both the persistence of the association of crowds with an industrial work force and a growing awareness that the social conditions that once supported this ideology of the crowd – namely, the existence of a national industrial work force – is fast being replaced with something other.

The reproductive conceit of Gramsci's dictum applies with an unmistakable literalness to the fixation on population throughout the world systemic crisis of the 1970s. What could be more exemplary of Gramsci's ideological monster than the hybrid, mutant

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[35] The most common French translation of Gramsci's dictim reads: "l'ancien se meurt, le nouveau ne parvient pas à voir le jour, dans ce clair-obscur surgissent les monstres." This is, in fact, a common mis-translation of Gramsci's mention of "sintomi morbosi" in French editions of the author's prison writing. The more accurate, if less lyrical, English translation speaks instead an "interregnum [in which] a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

collective of the "family," in *The Omega Man* – a nocturnal, neo-luddite, post-racial, evangelical, cult? If this referential excess in *The Omega Man* is an embryonic articulation of what Raymond Williams might name a cultural emergent trying to be born – one steeped in the Cold War and racial paranoia, but also anticipating the culture wars and identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s –, what makes it monstrous in Gramsci's sense is less the internal incoherence of its parts, than the way it is drawn over the symbolic architecture of the modernist crowd and its anxious demographic metaphorics. I have argued that the dialectic of visualizing the industrial city in early cinema returns with a special prominence and urgency in the science fiction film of the 1970s. In the latter case, however, the familiar, pulse of the city flooded and emptied of people becomes the means of projecting a structural misalignment, where the daily cycle of the reproduction of industrial labour retains its rhythmic consistency, but is inverted, causing the temporal order of labour/leisure and public/private to themselves become reversed and upended.

Examined seriously as an assembled symbolic whole, the projection and encryption of population fears in *The Omega Man* provide a striking example of the coexistence of incompatible economic and ideological regimes. At one level, this fractious conjunction of discursive regimes is formed of the transformation of the distribution of labour traceable to this moment, when the national parameters of the industrial reserve army begin to waver before an emergent trans-national distribution of production. It simultaneously names the concrete conformation of an environmental and epidemiological object of power that, as the persistent moral and racial accounts of the

unrestrained fecundity of "developing" nations repeatedly confirm, brings into view a dizzyingly expanded popular consciousness of world population, just as it reactivates old Malthusian fears of the 'great unwashed' to address the new, trans-national mobility of resources and people. While alarm about overpopulation during the 1970s attends to very real ecological problems (problems that, I should be clear, are as urgently in need of a sober look at population growth today as they were then), it is, retrospectively, perhaps just as remarkable as a record of the halting and uneven process of the invention of new codes and discursive procedures to express an emergent regime of accumulation.

As a point of departure for this dissertation and an attempt to sketch the trajectory of a cine-demographic aesthetics specific to the period that begins here, in the 1970s, the projection of science fictional images of demographic futures is also useful to pin-point the images of desertion and depopulation that flit into view. As the following chapters turn sharply toward the image of depopulation and demographic aging, the deserted city that begins to come into view through these ostensible fears of global overpopulation, underlines the fact that this moment of crisis and transition also marks the end of a short period, following the second world war, in which a diminishing total fertility rate in core capitalist nations was for a time reversed. By the end of the 1960s, in Western Europe and the United States, the "baby boom" had clearly ended, returning the number of children women were having to the trending decline evident before the war. In this sense, the fear of overpopulation that explodes into popular culture during the late 1960s and early 1970s is just as properly described as a response to the unevenness of global demographic behaviour and the emergent consciousness of population decline to which

the following two chapters are dedicated.

Chapter 2

Béla Tarr and the Aesthetics Demographic Decline

If the preceding chapter attempts to draw a synthetic picture of the way that an uneasy transition between economic and demographic rationalities appear in popular cinema during the 1970s, the process of mediation itself, which is to say the way in which these emergent knowledges are transposed, reflected and reworked in image and narrative form, has been left largely unaddressed. In this chapter, I would like to turn more directly to this latter set of problems and a more focused discussion of the way that aesthetic form can be interpreted in terms of a demographic sensibility.

Maintaining the underlying historical emplotment of a late capitalist cine-demography that unifies my project, my attention in what follows moves forward to the 1990s and early 2000s and a situation of demographic in Eastern Europe. In order to refocus my analysis on the ways in which this second historical conjuncture, through a different appearance of demographic crisis, can be interpreted aesthetically in film, I take the major work of Hungarian director, Béla Tarr, as a case through which to propose a political aesthetics of population crisis; in this case, of demographic decline. Provisionally bracketing an interrogation of the discursive construction of the crisis in expert knowledge and popular culture, my object in what follows is instead the theoretical basis for a political aesthetic that passes through a consideration of demographic behaviour. To this end, my argument in the first part of this chapter is occupied with a restatement of the perennial problem of cinematic realism, with an

emphasis on the tradition of this problem in Western Marxist thought. Examining the ways in which Tarr's films, and more specifically the aesthetic of slowness and decay that distinguishes his film style, can be used to challenge and expand the purview of a materialist aesthetics of realism today, I ask what it means to suggest an aesthetic of demographic decline. How does this proposition extend into, and reorganize existing models of aesthetic theory, sociology of culture and the political history of form?

Slow Cinema

I want to begin with an explication of what I take to be the specificity of Béla Tarr's later films and from the risky hypothesis, for those familiar with the development of his film style, that Tarr's *Satantango* (*Sátántangó*, 1994) and *Werckmeister Harmonies* (*Werckmeister harmóniák*, 2000) are a sustained effort to develop a new mode of realist film-making sufficient to a political situation that exceeds conventional coordinates of political aesthetics. Focusing Tarr's films through the problem of cinematic realism not only moves the discussion into the ambit of the materialist political aesthetics to which my analysis is finally addressed, but it also breaks with the common alignment of these films with the melancholic tone that registers across late and post-socialist cinema. Unlike Aleksandr Sokurov, with whom Tarr is so often coupled, I want to argue that this melancholy mode is misidentified with Tarr's work and is secondary to the latter's preoccupation with the politics and representational problem of a (post-socialist) cinema.

The narrative content of Tarr's films, which can be ascribed as much to the novelist László Krasznahorkai, who either wrote or co-wrote each of the scripts for Tarr's

three most recent films, is defined by an almost unmitigated sense of futility, claustrophobia, and spiritual exhaustion, expressed in the petty selfishness of the characters and the unremitting sarcasm of the narrative frame. The setting of Tarr's recent films is a world in which no position, no act and no promise is uncorrupted or even open to redemption; all that remains is repetition and the constant threat of betrayal and violence. In the most constant visual motif of his film making, Tarr's camera follows his characters back and forth through rainy, crumbling streets or muddy, country trails with a – ever-so-slowly – growing certainty that they are headed nowhere, or back again. *Damnation*, *Werckmeister Harmonies* and *Satantango* are all set in an unspecified Hungarian industrial town or rural backwater and in even less determinate time (communist, post-communist, or sometime altogether other…?); when combined with the fact that the same group of actors play the main roles in all these films and, indeed, sometimes play the same characters,[36] the no-place reinforces the constancy of this sense of a slow, repeating loop of events in each film extending in wider loops across all three of his later films. This repetition slowly draws in every aspect of the films: the consistency of rain, mud and crumbling concrete, the dismal drunken dance that recurs in each film, and the con-man or false messiah who impels the characters, with fire or boredom, through the motions of a plot that leads nowhere but back to the beginning again. The grim twists of the films' narrative contents do not, however, come through these overt signs of despair, but rather through the soaring, desperate, and poetic expressions of hope, love, and redemption that seem for a moment to reveal or explain,

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[36] The clearest example is the chief of police, who is played by the same actor in *Satantango* and *Werckmeister*.

only to slowly fade each time into a confusing memory or be revealed as sheer manipulation.

Within this total, but ultimately superficial despair, the arrival of the taxidermied whale in *Werckmeister Harmonies* provides a kind of ekphrastic allegory that seems itself to speak to the conditions for thinking a political aesthetic that, I want to argue, Tarr's recent films confront. The whale, part of a traveling curiosity or medicine show, arrives in the dead of night at the outset of the film and remains concealed within its sheet metal trailer, reserved for paying customers only. The viewer, like the characters of the film, is convinced that the whale holds some explanation for the restless, violent crowds of men that gradually fill the square where the trailer and the whale wait – "No good can come of something so big," mutters one character. The film nurtures the sense of mystery and foreboding that gathers around the whale, incorporating this object into the metaphysical systems and conceits of the two philosopher-fools of the film – János, a kind of Dostoyevskian idiot and protagonist of the film, and his musicologist Uncle György – who both nurture a special reverence for the giant creature. All this, however, is slowly revealed as the lead up to the film's cruel joke, as it becomes clear that the whale, while materially present alongside the mass violence that follows later, holds no secret, no cipher, no significance whatsoever for the violence. Following the sudden violent spree that sends the mob crashing through the town, Tarr leads us to read the destruction and the great whale lying discarded and exposed at the end of the film as a kind of anti-fascist allegory, condemning the metaphysical speculations of uncle György and the naivety of János – whom the whale, by this reading, comes to emblematize – as much as it does the

machinations of 'The Prince', a kind of prophet of nihilist destruction who leads the crowd, or the ambitions of minor characters like Aunt Tünde and the chief of police. However, beneath this cryptic and ultimately familiar liberal drama, there seems to be a more simple and more interesting reading.

In a very obvious way, the whale is an art object. Within, or beside the total culpability of the film's characters for the aimless violence that ensues, the whale is the ekphrastic centre piece of an allegory of aesthetic practice mirrored in the form of the film itself. The whale itself is, in fact, not destroyed; rather, it is its housing, the sheet-metal trailer, that appears torn apart and with it any sense of mystery of the object and of the process of its presentation to a public. Without its enclosure – which, it should be noted, limits access to the object and guarantees the profitability of the show – the whale is suddenly reduced to its brute materiality. To complete this reading of the whale in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, it is critical that not only is the final encounter with the exposed body of the whale a stripping away of its symbolic function, it is also a reclamation and refashioning of this unlikely object into a determinate relationship with the tangle of antagonism, contradiction and aimless violence that surrounds it. The significance of Tarr's films, what they can teach us about the conditions of thinking a political aesthetic today – and, of course, within the specific political-economic context of post-socialist Eastern Europe – begins with their radical reduction of the aesthetic act to this raw representation of the materiality of the object, stripped of its metaphysical trappings, but also bearing a weight that exceeds the betrayal, manipulation and political theatrics that surround it. In this sense, Tarr's films can be viewed as responding to this

prescription for aesthetic practice and, in so doing, offer a way to rethink the political aesthetics of realism today.

Fig. 3.1 The whale exposed at the conclusion of *Werckmeister Harmonies*

The three later films of Béla Tarr – *Damnation*, *The Werckmeister Harmonies* and *Satantango* - are distinguished above all by their extension and exaggeration of narratological, compositional and structural tendencies that can be traced both backward along a line of historical precursors and laterally across what has become a recognizable set of regionally-located filmmakers. Narratologically, Tarr's films represent an extreme reduction of the content and pacing of the plot. The exemplary case is *Satantango*, a film of some seven-and-a-half hours that unfolds little more than the story of the members of a failing agricultural commune who are convinced by a former associate and known confidence man to invest in a non-existent property. While the tangential sub-plots that

intervene into the story tend to present the rare events of the films, the thin and uneventful narrative thread that occupies the majority of the films are stretched to an extent that would seem impossible to maintain, were it not for the cinematographic work through which they unfold. A series of cinematographic devices affect a near cryogenic slowing of the spectators' attention. Similarly, *Damnation* opens with a single, fixed camera shot, lasting almost seven minutes, of industrial containers on an suspended cable, moving from left to right of the picture; the camera focus retracts, millimetre by millimetre, showing first a window through which the containers are framed, then the figure of Karrer, the film's protagonist, revealing his seated form an inch at a time.

It is difficult to find examples in traditional, narrative cinema that compare to the extended duration that shots like this achieve. While there are a growing list of extremely long shots, particularly in Eastern European film over the past decades – Alexandr Sokurov's hour long walking, steady-cam shot in *Russian Ark* being the most recent, spectacular example, it is the way that Tarr matches extended shot with minimal camera movement and, still more distinctively, with the lack of movement within the frame that defines the particular slowness of his films. In each of these three films, one encounters ten-minute long shots which capture a character breathing, staring, moving to the window and back to a chair; Tarr's camera will focus on a solitary pig standing still in the rain, or contemplate the texture of a wall, a door, a sheer curtain. Indeed, there are long sequences in *Satantango* that linger on abandoned utility buildings or kitchen wallpaper with such deliberation as to only be comparable with experimental works such as Andy Warhol's infamous 8 hour film of the Empire State building (*Empire*, 1964). Placed in

the context of narrative film, however, the grammar and pacing of Tarr's work arguably

raise a different set of questions about the way that the aesthetic problem of realism

might account for a representational practice that mirrors the movement of time so

precisely that it, paradoxically, undermines the reality *effect* for the spectator.

The slow-motion of Tarr's camera goes beyond the long-takes of Tarkovsky,

Angelopolis or Sukurov, to which Tarr is often compared, by matching the length of the

shot and minimal movement of the camera with the slowness of the image captured. The

cumulative effect of the long takes, slow movement (or stillness) of the camera and the

un-eventful content of the narrative and *mise-en-scene* push beyond the quantitative

changes in cinematographic work in other directors into a qualitative transformation of

the effect. Indeed, the extent to which Tarr's film style seems to test a kind of limit of

cinematic duration is borne out by their strange resemblance to the found footage work of

Martin Arnold, pieces distinguished by an *excess* of editing. In Arnold's work, the single

second of a celluloid frame is cut into pieces and repeated hundreds of times, exposing

not only the materiality of the medium, but a new fullness of the gestural life of the

original image, slowed to a looping stand-still. This radically artificial manipulation of

the temporality of the moving image produces the surprising effect of an amplification of

the mimetic capacity of the original image. For example, by stretching a few seconds of

film from the 1962 production of *To Kill a Mockingbird* over more than five minutes,

Arnold's *Passage à l'acte* (1993) produces the bizarre sense of uncertainty for the viewer

about whether this manipulation of the film has distorted the original into some entirely

separate, formalist work, or if by focusing our attention on the micro-gestural content in

each second of film, it has presented for the first time the truth of the actors' bodies, the set and object world that the shot captures. On a strictly technical level, Arnold's work and Tarr's films can be positioned at opposite extremes of the possibilities of film editing: while Tarr's films are marked by the conspicuous paucity of cutting, Martin's works test the opposite extreme, where the shot is cut and re-cut hundreds of times a minute. The strange meeting at the poles of the conventional spectrum of the film style that this comparison stages not only undermines the battered distinction between montage and shot, but puts into relief the particular possibilities and challenges Tarr's films offer for a re-thinking of realist representation today.

Fig. 3.2 A realism of the split-second in Martin Arnold's Passage a l'acte (1993). (Mary Badham playing Jean Louise "Scout" Finch in To Kill a Mockingbird [1962])

Like Arnold's looped seconds of film, the lengthening of the duration of shots in *Satantango* effectively transmutes a quantitative manipulation of time into a qualitative break in the way the film's epistemological claim to the real is grasped. A long shot of a

kitchen scene in the first hour of *Satantango* presents an exemplary case. Placing the camera at one end of an unlit kitchen, Tarr introduces the first characters of the story with a fixed-camera shot that focuses on a darkened kitchen table long enough that the room becomes lit through the window, by the rising morning sun. At almost 10 minutes, this single, fixed shot is punctuated only by a figure silently entering the frame, pausing to look out the window and leaving the frame again. What is produced for the viewer is a kind of total absorption in the materiality of the kitchen and its objects; the sheer curtain, the ashtray, the activity of a fly in the room: through a sort of 10 minute fade-in, these banal objects, more than the actors themselves, bear most of the weight of our attention. Together with the equally long sequence shot of cows exiting a barn that opens the film and before any hint of narrative content has been added to the story, the film seems to make a complex aesthetic and epistemological claim.

Deleuze's Time-Image and the Persistence of Realism

Gilles Deleuze's two part study of cinema turns upon a simple observation about cinema's representation of time. Deleuze's guiding claim is a historical one – if a very thin one – which distinguishes between the cinema roughly preceding the Second World War, in which the representation of time remains indirect and tethered to the representation of movement in space, and a post-war cinema in which the representation of time is pushed to the forefront of cinematic image. For Deleuze, the time-image emerges precisely at the moment that time ceases to be measured by and tethered to the expected, somatic, tactile intervals of space-time experienced outside the cinema – what

Deleuze calls "loosening of the sensory-motor linkage" (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* ix) – and is rendered on its own terms, without need of reference to movement. Indeed, Deleuze's suggestion in his analysis of the post-war time-image is that the development of cinema is a process prodded in a vague way by historical events, by which cinema realizes a technological capacity to create a more definite, direct and full experience of time than an everyday experience of lived time alone could allow. "What is specific to the image," Deleuze writes, "as soon as it is creative [i.e. no longer subordinated by the sensory-motor schema], is to make visible relationships of time which cannot be seen in the represented object and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the present" (ibid. xii).

Deleuze offer a theoretical vantage point from which to at least begin to think the strange confluence of the extreme formal experiments with the temporal duration of the image in Martin and Tarr's works, but only to the extent that both directors' films seem to begin where Deleuze's time-image leaves off. If we remain within the confines of Deleuze's philosophical-aesthetic typology, the case of Tarr's films seems to exceed the terms and the narrative offered. If the incomplete shift from a "movement-image" to the direct "time-image" is, as Deleuze argues, marked by the breakdown of all manner of spatial and temporal continuity in cinematic representation, Tarr's film, at the same time that it draws out one version of the direct presentation of time, seems to proceed by way of an absolute return to what Deleuze calls a "sensory-motor linkage." Characteristic moments in Tarr's films, like the extended steady-cam shots in *Werckmeister Harmonies* that follow characters, step for step, through streets, or the memorable sequence in *Satantango* that follows the obese, intoxicated body of the doctor for almost twenty

minutes through the agonizingly slow, wheezing process of standing up and sitting down again, these representative sequences, in their almost unbearable fidelity to the continuity of tactile, embodied movement in time, in fact work to estrange the expected duration of the cinematic image. In other words, through what one can imagine as an excessive fidelity to the passing of time and the articulation of motion in time, Tarr's films effectively produce the *effect* of what Deleuze aptly describes as the "direct relation with time and thought" of the time-image, but do so through a radicalization of an adhesion to the familiar, habitual linkage of motion in time.

However, what appears as a contradiction in Deleuze's typology can, in fact, be reconceived in terms of its collision with the latent, unresolved dialectical structure of the problem of representation that Deleuze seeks to sidestep. Deleuze's attempt to outline the problem of cinema in terms of different strategies of representing time is a more or less explicit attempt to stage a philosophical argument concerning the bifurcation of time into the virtual and actual – a task that occupies much of Deleuze's later writings. His attempt to develop a fuller conception of the real that would contain not merely the concrete presentation of the actual, but also the virtual plane of desire and affective potential is mirrored in the image's own virtuality vis-à-vis its imaginary distinction from the actual-real and, yet again, in the epistemological analogy contained in the doubleness of the image itself, at once a representational relation (virtual) and, itself, aesthetic object (actual). The cinematic representation of time which finds increasingly direct expression in the post-war time-image, for Deleuze, becomes a sort of staging area: a philosophical

inquiry into the relationship of the virtual and actual, a point at which the two planes meet and over-lap.

Despite an (at best) ambivalent critical attitude toward dialectical thought, Deleuze's model of cinema presents a latent, or arrested dialectic structure. Jacques Rancière has recently argued something similar, pointedly detailing the untenability of Deleuze's periodizing typology of the image and suggesting that if we are to draw something from Deleuze's "fictive rupture," it is a partial, symptomatic expression of the "dialectic constitutive of the cinema" which itself jeopardizes any attempt to anchor specific traits to specific periods as Deleuze tries to do (Rancière, *Film Fables* 107-123). In order to give positive shape to this claim, I want to suggest that Deleuze's reading of cinematic time against a conception of the bifurcation of the real into the actual and virtual is precisely another way of grasping the paradoxical doubleness that is at the center of the problematic of realism in Marxist aesthetic thought. Though it is to reduce what is among the most notoriously slippery of terms in aesthetic theory, Marxist or otherwise, to a snippet, the problem of realism in Western Marxist aesthetic thought tends to centre around realism's compounding of what Fredric Jameson describes as its twin epistemological and aesthetic claims (cf. Fredric. "The Existence of Italy"; Jameson, "Afterword"). On the one hand, the relative realism ascribed to an art object or text describes a truth claim enacted in the work, or a capacity to accurately "know" or reveal a reality outside itself; on the other hand, realism describes a set of what are essentially formal conventions that are typically defined by a break with the tradition of elevated or conceited structural and formal expectations. While ostensibly eschewing the conceptual

apparatus of re-presentation, Deleuze's typology of images, held up against this conception of realism, nevertheless seems to reproduce this doubled epistemological and aesthetic claim. Deleuze's distinction between movement-image and time-image seems to describe instead a typology of modes of representing time in film, the former depending more strictly upon the epistemological, the latter depending on the open, autonomous time of the aesthetic. To reshape Deleuze's time into a discussion of realism has the virtue not only of providing a more precise way of situating the function of Tarr's treatment of time, but also of recasting the contradictions that grow out of Deleuze's formulation in terms of the long dialectical movement of this problem through the past century of Marxist aesthetic theory.

The conception of realism that I am relying upon, which can be traced back to Georg Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* (1920), finds its most recent restatement in Fredric Jameson essay "The Existence of Italy." At the outset of this essay, Jameson writes that realism is a

> particularly unstable concept owing to its simultaneous, yet incompatible, aesthetic and epistemological claims, as the two terms of the slogan, 'representation of reality,' suggest. These two claims then seem contradictory: the emphasis on this or that type of truth content will clearly be undermined by any intensified awareness of the technical means or representational artifice of the work itself. Meanwhile, the attempt to reinforce and to shore up the epistemological vocation of the work generally involves the suppression of the formal properties of the realistic 'text' and promotes an increasingly naive and unmediated or reflective conception of aesthetic construction and reception. Thus, where the epistemological claim succeeds, it fails; and if realism validates its claim to being a correct or true representation of the world, it thereby ceases to be an aesthetic mode of representation and falls out of art altogether. If, on the other hand, the artistic devices and technological equipment whereby it captures that truth of the world are explored and stressed and foregrounded, 'realism' will stand unmasked as a mere reality- or realism-effect, the reality it purported to deconceal falling at once into the sheerest representation and illusion. Yet no viable

conception of realism is possible unless both these demands or claims are honoured simultaneously, prolonging and preserving rather than 'resolving' this constitutive tension and incommensurability. (158)

The constitutive conflict of realism's dual claim to an epistemological act of "deconcealment" of the real and the mimetic act of faithful re-presentation of the real, precisely by re-linking the image to the now-historicized object itself, cuts diagonally across Deleuze's philosophy of the cinematic image in a way that at once highlights its incompleteness and concretizes its analytic application.

Tarr's films introduce a twist into both Deleuze's schema of the time-image and Jameson's dichotomous model of realism. How do we theorize the moment that the fidelity to a mimetic principle is rendered so fully, precisely in its representation of movement in time, as to *disable* its claim to the actuality of the real? In other words, what does it mean for an uninterrupted, motionless shot of an unremarkable kitchen, through its unmarked and unmanipulated representation of time, to undermine *both* the film's epistemological claim to the real and, most peculiarly of all, the success of the *reality-effect* in its projection of time? The two channels along which the idea of realism operates for Jameson – epistemological and aesthetic – open up the possibility of thinking realism and the filmic image of time more generally in its dialectical development in a way that Deleuze, for his own reasons, does not. In some sense, the notion of a renewed, "postmodern" realism that Jameson develops later in "The Existence of Italy" evolves from and, in at least one sense, completes the theoretical gesture that Deleuze initiates. Deleuze's analysis of the cinematic image emerges from a parallel argument about the virtuality and actuality of the real. Jameson's development of a renewed realism depends,

in a closely aligned way, upon a familiarly Marxist conception of the real as simultaneously true and false. Where Jameson's thinking completes Deleuze's, however, is in its capacity to position the dialectic of the image or of representation within a more concrete political history of ideology and critique.

The tentative conclusion that Jameson comes to in his theorization of (cinematic) realism is that realism has, in a sense, outgrown its own concept. This proposition should, perhaps, not be so surprising; not only does it fit as a characteristic turn of dialectical thought, negating the internal oppositions that realism describes for Jameson, but it is also an unambiguous extension of Roman Jakobson's canonical argument in "On Realism in Art," an argument that repeats itself in the work of every major theorist of realism in the twentieth century – Georg Lukács, Roland Barthes, André Bazin, Erich Auerbach – indeed, Barthes' usefully concise notion of a "reality effect" (*l'effet de réel)* is at base a restatement of Jakobson. Revisiting the numerous reinventions of the formal concept of realism, Jakobson's short essay locates an essential ambiguity that springs from "the extreme relativity of the concept of 'realism'" (Jakobson 24). Jakobson writes,

> It is necessary to learn the conventional language of a painting in order to "see" a picture…This conventional, traditional aspect of painting to a great extent conditions the very act of our visual perception. As tradition accumulates, the painted image becomes an ideogram, a formula, to which the object portrayed is linked by contiguity. Recognition becomes instantaneous. We no longer see a picture. The ideogram needs to be deformed. The artist-innovator must impose a new form upon our perceptions, if we are to detect in a given thing those traits which went unnoticed the day before…Thus Kramskoj, one of the founders of the so-called realist school of Russian painting, recounts in his memoirs his efforts to deform to the utmost the principles of composition as advocated by the Academy. The motivation behind this "disorder" was the desire for a closer approximation of reality (ibid 21).

Written in 1919 and from the epicentre of Russian modernism, Jakobson's conception of realism in terms of an opposition of conservative and progressive aesthetic and perceptual regimes ascribes a definite political content to these aesthetic tendencies. The uniqueness and contemporary relevance of Jameson's contribution to a theory of realism comes through his transposition of Jakobson's argument after a century of modernisms and, more specifically, at a moment when many of the deep structural assumptions of the concept of realism, as any of its major theorists grasped it, appear to have been outpaced by wider developments in the field and function of culture.

Jameson's touchstone for reconceiving the problem of realism remains the now famous debate of the mid-twentieth century concerning literary modernism, centring around Georg Lukács' critique of expressionism. Indeed, it is through a kind of inversion of the terms of this debate that Jameson's argument for a renewed realism emerges. Lukács' frontal attack on expressionism and modernist writing in general in a series of essays in 1919 and 1920 became the locus for a well-known conversation among Western Marxist cultural theorists that stretched over the following two decades. In these seminal essays, Lukács attacks modernist writing as a form of bourgeois subjectivism defined against realist writing by narrative and representational form that Lukács argued mystify the relationship of these subjectivities to a framing social totality. Brecht, in a kind of anti-thesis to Lukács' position, criticized the latter's formalist attachment to a 19th century realist novel that relied on fixed assumptions about the aesthetic that no longer matched the conditions for class struggle. Writing after the Second World War, Adorno provides a form of synthetic resolution to these two earlier positions, co-opting Lukács'

own system of a Marxist aesthetics to argue that the modernist 'fragmentation' and 'subjectivism' that Lukács condemned in the formal experimentation of the modernist novel now held the sole precarious claim to reflecting a social totality that had itself changed and to which unmediated access had been made impossible. Thus, in his *Aesthetic Theory* (1966), Adorno could write:

> today the primacy of the object and aesthetic realism are almost absolutely opposed to each other, and indeed when measured by the standard of realism: Beckett is more realistic than the socialist realists who counterfeit reality by their very principle. If they took reality seriously enough they would eventually realize what Lukács condemned when during the days of his imprisonment in Romania he is reported to have said that he had finally realized that Kafka was a realist writer. (406)

After more than half a century of modernisms, Jameson's return to this debate makes the case for yet another dialectical inversion or folding of the problem of realism. He writes:

> In our present cultural situation, if anything, both alternatives of realism and of modernism seem intolerable to us: realism because its forms revive older experiences of a kind of social life…which is no longer with us in the already decaying future of consumer society: modernism because its contradictions have proved in practice even more acute than those of realism….In these circumstances, indeed, there is some question whether the ultimate renewal of modernism, the final dialectical subversion of the now automatized conventions of an aesthetics of perceptual revolution, might not simply be…realism itself! For when modernism and its accompanying techniques of 'estrangement' have become the dominant style whereby the consumer is reconciled with capitalism, the habit of fragmentation itself needs to be 'estranged' and corrected by a more totalizing way of viewing phenomena. ("Reflections" 211)

While Jameson's conception of realism allows for a tremendous amount of flexibility as far as what specific form the "reality-effect" might assume today, it maintains the ideal of realism as a project of political "deconcealment" that preoccupies Western Marxist

aesthetic theory, regardless of whether it is affirmative or critical of the possibilities of a genuine realism at a given historical conjuncture.

Deleuze's theory of cinematic time condenses a number of things that provide a way toward rethinking Tarr's films in terms of their engagement with the problem of a realist aesthetic. In the first place, in his *Cinema* books, Deleuze reads the parallel development of a philosophical position which takes the 'splitting' of time that emerged with Bergson and attempts to unify this split into a fuller conception of the real. The rupture that severs the post-war "time-image" from an earlier dependence of cinematic representation of time on movement projects, for Deleuze, the image of a new fullness of time. In light of Deleuze's narrative of the evolution of cinematic time, Tarr's films are striking, in the first place, in their capacity to undermine Deleuze's distinction between time-image and movement-image, producing an unmistakably cinematic monstration of time precisely through their almost excessive fidelity to the expected movement of bodies in time. Troubling Deleuze's typology of the cinematic in this way, Tarr's films point to a partiality and inflexibility in Deleuze's system that, as I will suggest in more concrete terms below, foregrounds the missing sense of the historicity of cinematic form apparent in Deleuze's categories. The problem of realism in Marxist aesthetic theory further highlights this problem. Here, it is possible to resituate the evolution of cinematic time as an evolving problem, subject not only to the development of the technical, mediatic and even cognitive capacities of film, but also to material transformations outside itself. A dialectical theory of realism allows for and, indeed, expects the kind of involution of

recognizable formal categories that I have been arguing is apparent in the total effect of Tarr's film work.

A Biopolitical Aesthetic?

If there remains something that we can call the aesthetic, there remains the possibility, however slim it may appear at times, of representing a totality through a particularity, even if the act returns only evidence of the fragmentation or absence of this totality. Jameson and others have sought to reground these problems in terms of specific transformations in the constitution of capitalist accumulation, the virtuality of financialization and the flattening of time-space ushered in by the globalization of networks of production, communication and consumption. While all of these means of articulating contemporary cultural and aesthetic tendencies to parallel transformations in systems of social relations remain useful, there is reason to suggest that Marxist aesthetic theory has failed to keep pace with parallel transformation of the optics and operation of power that have been widely diagnosed in the composition and reproduction of capitalism today. One way of articulating the need for a reassessment of a Marxist aesthetic theory today coheres around what can be simplified as a pervasive split between a Hegelian and Spinozian division of Marxist thought that has developed since the late 1960s. The spatial and geographical metaphors of the postmodern and "cognitive mapping" have provided an extremely generative route to begin to rethink the project of a renewed theory of political aesthetics that I have touched upon in my discussion of Jameson's contribution to the problem of realism. At the same time, the past decade has witnessed an explosion

of accounts of the present conjuncture that draw on the Foucauldian concept of biopower to describe apparently epochal changes in the reproduction of social relations. Despite the concurrence and apparently homologous project of these two dominant periodizing accounts in social and cultural theory, there remains relatively little cross-pollination between them.

Foucault's original formulation of biopolitics remains the most compelling and useful one. Foucault uses the terms biopower and biopolitics to group together the elements of what he sees as a gradual shift that begins in the late 18th century from the primacy of a disciplinary modality of domination – addressing itself to individual bodies, through the segmentation, atomization and regimentation of the social body into discrete self-regulating subjects – to an emergent, biopolitical modality of control which reproduces and acts upon the social at the level of the population or species through the measurement and adjustment of probabilities and statistical norms. The birth of biopolitical control is the emergence of the idea of "a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on" (*Society Must be Defended* 242); in short, and without taking away from the emphasis that Foucault places on evolution of sexuality and continued and obvious relevance of new forms of disciplinary control, biopolitics names a form of domination that works demographically.[37] The fact that Foucault sees Dutch mercantilism as a sort of laboratory for the development of biopolitical control underlines the extent to which the imperative

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[37] Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* 41-46, 100-108; Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended"* 242-9; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 139-140; Foucault "The Birth of Social Medicine" 134–156. See also, Curtis, "Foucault on Governmentality and Population".

to "make live and let die" that Foucault identifies with this emergent order are not only deeply integrated in the development of European capitalism, but can be explicitly traced through Marxist analysis of primitive accumulation, the lever of unemployment and of the social reproduction of capitalism generally. As materialist feminists have convincingly argued for decades, an analysis of capitalism that takes fuller account of the mode of *reproduction* not only redresses a deep lack in the internal coherence of existing theories of accumulation, but also sends ripples through all theoretical extensions of Marxist critique.

Wally Seccombe has provided perhaps the most sustained and expansive exploration of the relationship between transformations in regimes of capital accumulation and the fertility regimes that accompany these shifts. Seccombe's numerous articles and two book-length studies – *A Millennium of Family Change* (1992) and *Weathering the Storm* (1995) – provide deep demographic evidence of seminal, but largely circumspective arguments that had been marshalled by an earlier wave of materialist feminists – Gayle Rubin, Christine Delphi, Maria Della Costa and Silvia Federici – for the constitutive connection between violent interventions into reproductive traditions and practices in early modern European societies and the so-called primitive accumulation.[38] Looking first at the emergence of capitalism from feudal societies in North Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries and subsequently at the development of industrial societies over the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Seccombe develops the thesis that periods of crisis and transformation of capitalist regimes of accumulation

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[38] See, for example, Delphi; Kuhn and Wolpe; Dalla Costa and Dalla Costa; Federici; Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism*.

develop in *reciprocal relation* to periods of crisis and transformation of the regimes of reproduction, centred on the family and manifesting in dramatic demographic fluctuations in longevity, fertility, rate of disease, rate of abortion and so on. Sidestepping the kind of polemic intransigence that has characterized Marxist responses to demographic insights into the theory of capitalist crisis and transformation, exemplified in the so-called "Brenner Debate" in the late 1970s (Aston and Philpin), but also criticizing the tendency toward a defensive and finally counter-productive over-emphasis on the significance of domestic and reproductive labour within materialist feminist circles, Seccombe makes a theoretical and empirical case for a perspective that grasps the mode of production as the dialectical co-determination of population dynamics and family structures, on the one hand, and political economy on the other ("Marxism and Demography" 22-47; *A Millennium of Family Change* 9-30, 133-135, 172-175, 200, 229-239).

While Seccombe's attempt to work critically from within a Marxist analytic of class and capital accumulation reflects what appears as a homologous development of a critique of economism (and "culturalism") that in some sense forms the origin of British cultural studies, there remains a decided absence of evidence of a cross-pollination between these two parallel and structurally analogous aspects of the turn to culture in Marxist thought. Few would dispute the pervasive influence of feminist critique on the way in which theories of social reproduction have been re-articulated in cultural theory, but the extent to which this influence – particularly in American cultural studies – has been coloured, if not entirely co-opted, by what increasingly appear to be liberal

subjectivist frameworks of "difference" seems to leave little space for a substantive integration of materialist feminist analysis of the mode of (re)production into cultural theory at large (see, for instance, Hennessy and Ingraham 1-16). If the still-pervasive undervaluation of the significance of reproduction in the process of accumulation is reflected by a parallel weakness in cultural theory, the recent explosion of interest among social and cultural theorists on the left in 'affective labour,' 'immaterial labour' and 'care work' in analysis certainly demonstrates its impact. Despite these developments, sparked largely by the immense success of Hardt and Negri's *Empire* in 2001, these insights into the social, political and economic composition of the current conjuncture have failed to be translated in a thorough-going way into Marxist aesthetics and theories of mediation.[39]

What would it mean to synthesize such a theory of a biopolitical regime of domination into a Marxist theory of cultural mediation? It is conventional to grasp the formal characteristics of a given text or cultural object in terms of its mediation of macro-structural transformation of the mode of production: the formation of the realist novel contemporaneous with the secularization of the world under capitalism, or European modernism's fragmentation of time as the sign of an imperial reach or the "spatial fix" of capital accumulation. To suggest that a given text mediates a macro-structural transformation of the demographic life of a population, however, seems likely received as evidence of, at best, a category mistake or, at worst, of a form of Malthusianism. If we can accept the notion that the contours of the social totality can take, and indeed have taken on biopolitical characteristics, should one not then expect that the problematic of

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[39] Cf. Hardt and Negri, *Empire*; Hardt "Affective Labor"; Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor"; Hardt and Negri. *Labor of Dionysus* 58-62.

cultural mediation – the manner by which culture and individual works reflect, subvert or obscure this totality – should register this changing character of the social?

Really Existing Population Decline

It is here that I would like to return once more to Tarr's films. The social and historical context from which Tarr's films emerge and through which they have been interpreted, provides an interesting case to test some of the possibilities of thinking through a theory of aesthetic mediation that could take account of demographic pressures upon the social. In what has been written on Tarr's films, the evolution of a distinctive kind of realist project in Tarr's most recent films has been approached almost exclusively in terms of the various lineages of his work.[40] Tarr's first films – *Family Nest* (*Családi tűzfészek,* 1977), *The Outsider* (*Szabadgyalog*, 1981) and *Prefab People* (*Panelkapcsolat*, 1982) – reveal the influence of his involvement with the so-called documentary fiction school that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s around the films of István Dárday and György Szalay in Hungary, but also resonate with work in Western Europe, such of the films of Peter Watkins. The films of the documentary fiction school are characterized by the use of hand-held cameras, amateur actors and improvised dialogue, often in the form of documentary-style interviews. The school and Tarr's earliest films in particular draw on the tradition of radical documentary making like the late sixties Godard and the Dziga Vertov group as well as contemporaneous films of the New German Cinema, particularly

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[40] See, for example: Rosenbaum, 'A Place in the Pantheon'; Atkinson; Maslin; Bordwell; Hames; Totaro; Romney. A great exception to this characterization is András Bálint Kovács' 2001 essay, "The World According to Béla Tarr."

Fassbinder. These early films can thus be located within the trajectory of social realism that seeks to reveal things "as they really are" and, at the level of narrative, they conform to realist conventions in a way that the later films tend not to – there are no whales, nor intimations of metaphysical conspiracy here. The second important line of influence that critics focus on begins with Tarr's adaptation of *Macbeth* in 1980 in which Tarr filmed the entire 72 minute film in just two shots, the second beginning after the credits and lasting 67 minutes. The interest in form and the adoption of the extreme long take draws comparison with similar experiments in Miklós Jancsó's Italian films and the long sequence shots of Andrei Tarkovsky, as well as similar tendencies in contemporary (Eastern European) film makers such as Alexandr Sokurov and Theo Angelopolis.

The mature style of Tarr's later film-making is typically treated by film critics as a compound solution of these two earlier moments.[41] While the genealogies often seem to overlook what seem to me some of the more decisive influences – particularly the ambulatory cinematography of early Jancsó – this obsessive interest in lineages tends to obscure what is most provocative and interesting in Tarr's later films. To adopt, for the moment, the terms of the two lines of influence typically drawn to explain later Tarr, what is striking, though never noted, about Tarr's fusion of these two sets of formal and narrative principles – the gritty social realism of the documentary fiction school and the formalism and long takes of Tarkovsky – is the extent to which the political intention, or function typically associated with each, are delinked and reversed in Tarr. Though it is through the use of amateur actors, improvised performance and narrative content that the

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[41] I am drawing, in particular, upon András Bálint Kovács' "The World According to Béla Tarr" which offers the most thorough and convincing overview of Tarr career available in English.

films of the documentary fiction school seek to convey a kind of rawness of the real, it is the scripts, acting and self-consciously theatrical dialogue of Tarr's later films which seem to conform least to any description of realism. Likewise, as I outlined earlier, it is in Tarr's staging and camera work, which critics are so quick to compare with the formalism and 'spiritualism' of Tarkovsky, that the ambivalent, estranging reality-effect of Tarr's treatment of time is rooted. While this reversal underlines the case for the unique development of realist cinema in Tarr's later films, it is finally not my interest to engage a comparative study of his films various realisms.

The comparison of auteurs and formal lineages does little, by itself, to locate the significance of Tarr's films within a discussion of the politics of the film aesthetic today. Though it is important to make exception for what appears to be, in general, a more thoughtful response that has come from the ever-active field of French film criticism,[42] in what little has been written on Tarr in English, there is no substantial articulation of the distinctive formal features of Tarr's films to the dramatic transformation of the political and economic situation in Eastern Europe during the 1980s and 1990s. Certainly nothing has been written – on Tarr, or any other film maker for that matter – concerning the situation of film-making in post-socialist Eastern Europe within a historically unprecedented condition of natural population decline.

Over the past twenty years, Eastern Europe has undergone a historically unprecedented "natural" demographic transformation; in 1980, the then communist bloc

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[42] See for instance the 2007 special feature of essays on melancholy and film in *Positif*. Though with perhaps more theoretical sophistication, the two pieces devoted to Tarr's films in this issue tends to mirrors familiar Anglophone comparisons with Bresson, Tarkovsky, Angelopolis and Sokurov.

of nations had among the highest total fertility rates, and while these numbers had already begun to dip during the Brezhnev years, they continued to experience a general decrease in child mortality rates and increase in life expectancy. In short, among industrialized nations, Russia and the communist nations of Eastern Europe entered the final decade of communist governments in the region with net population growth. Twenty years later, at the turn of the millennium, demographic indicators show not only an often steep decline in fertility, but also a static and even declining life expectancy across the region. Russia has been given particularly close attention by demographers. In 2000, one report described Russia as a country "where men have almost no chance of living to retirement, women are doomed to widowhood, and many children face the bitter fate of orphans" (Maleva 26). Evaluations such as this, while subject to extreme variance between urban and rural areas and from nation to nation, do broadly describe the characteristics of what is now recognized as a stable regional trend toward demographic decline: dramatic gendered imbalance of life expectancy, an increasing divorce rate and fluctuating rates of abortion that, in turn, have lead to a marked increase in the numbers of orphaned children. The true uniqueness of the demographic situation in the region, however, is the fact that it is the first to have experience a sustained and in many cases (Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Romania) sharp decline in birth versus deaths for reason other than war, famine or disease (Powell). The combined result is that Eastern European countries represent the great majority of states currently experiencing annual declines in population.[43] In short,

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[43] Unless otherwise indicated all statistics are drawn from the United Nations' *World Population Prospectus*. 2008 Revision.

even excluding the loss of life attributable to the Balkan wars of the 1990s, the population of Eastern Europe is slowly and "naturally" dying off.

To isolate some of the demographic features of this dramatic and historically unprecedented transition more precisely, since the mid-1980s the region has experienced a unique combination of plummeting total fertility rates and static or declining life expectancy. Between 1985 and 1990, the total fertility rate for Eastern Europe was 2.10, substantially higher than any developed nation; the current total fertility rate in Eastern Europe is now the lowest in the world, with the rate for the region as a whole hovering around 1.2, well below replacement. By comparison, the total fertility rate in the United States is currently 2.05; even an aging Western Europe, which has experienced decades of gradual drop in the number of children being born, now has markedly higher birth rates (1.42) than those of former socialist nations. While Hungary, by comparison with other countries in the region. has experienced a relatively gradual transition to low fertility, between 1980 and 2005, the total fertility rate dropped from 2.11 to 1.30. Life expectancy, the other broad contributor to population decline, dropped from 1980 to 2005; in Eastern Europe as a whole it dropped from 69.0 to 67.1. While this may not seem drastic, over the same period, by comparison, the average life expectancy at birth in Central America rose from 65.9 to 73.9, and in Western Europe from 73.1 to 79.0. The gross effect of these changes is an enormously accelerated transition to the lower fertility rates that have developed over a century or more in Western European nations, without improved health, social services and the lengthening life spans that are typically associated with this transition. Thus, while in an rapidly aging region of Western Europe

the average annual rate of population growth is currently 0.36, Hungary's population declines at a annual rate of -0.27, Russia's at -0.40 and Eastern Europe as a whole averages a population growth of -0.37. It is no exaggeration to say that the population of the region is shrinking.

The relationship between the transition from socialism to capitalism and these demographic changes remains uncertain. The degree of historical concordance between these two processes is subject to substantial local variation, with many states showing signs of lower total fertility rates long before the collapse of state socialist governments in the region. Indeed, as far as a general theory of demographic transition, the history of population decline in Eastern Europe contributes to a broader rethinking of institutionalized demography's models for understanding the relationship between fertility and 'socio-economic development.' While low birthrates are now common across the advanced industrial nations, this demographic "transition" has gone hand-in-hand with an extension of the average life-cycle brought about by improved health care, lifestyle and, finally, of that suspiciously hyphenated construction, "socio-economic development" (cf. Caldwell, "Toward a Restatement"; Szreter, "The Idea of Demographic Transition"; Greenhalgh, "The Social Construction of Population Science"). The original, and to a great extent relied-upon theory of demographic transition is built upon the assumption of an inverse relationship between the total fertility rate and economic growth. Simply put, rich, "Westernized" countries will tend to have fewer babies. Though critical interventions emerging out of feminist, postcolonial and science studies have begun to contribute to the relatively thin theoretical side of

population science, it has been the immense quantitative evidence against this rather vulgar modernization theory of fertility behaviour that has been most influential in producing a rethinking of the theory of demographic transition (ibid; see also, Caldwell and Schindlmayr). From 2005-2009, life expectancy in Eastern European nations has ranked among the lowest of what the UN classifies as "more developed regions;" moreover, while Eastern European figures are low by the standards of life expectancy in Western European nations during the 1970s, they remain relatively static thereafter and are, in some cases, even in decline. Perhaps the most significant distinction between the context of low fertility rates in Western Europe and the similar, though far more precipitous, decline in total fertility in Eastern Europe is the way in which the latter has taken place without the relative jump in economic and infrastructural growth expected by mainstream, liberal theory of demographic transition. The positive relationship between long-term patterns of economic, industrial and infrastructural growth and a gradual transition toward replacement or sub-replacement birth rates is quite simply not applicable in the great majority of former socialist states.[44]

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[44] The lack of a accepted interpretation of the political-economic roots of the "fertility crisis" in post-socialist countries is rendered starkly in two recent and utterly contradictory glosses from population scientists: First, concerning fertility decline in Russia, *Shkolnikov and* Cornia write: "[a]fter November 1989 the populations of all these countries succeeded, essentially through their own efforts, in freeing themselves from their oppressive regimes. No wonder that these 'economies in transition' rapidly became 'demographies in transition." Second, Moslav Macura explains the demographic crisis in Russia after 1989: "To sum up, disposable incomes fell, the monetary cost of children to parents rose as cash benefits declined, subsidized or free childcare services were scaled down or eliminated, and (probably) new public housing became scarce. Additionally, anomie, disorientation, and uncertainty grew. The reaction, an eminently rational one, to these conditions was to postpone or forgo births, demonstrating a distrust of the future among parents and parents-to-be." And contrasting with both these accounts is the fact, readily apparent in the census data, that the total fertility rate in Central and Eastern Europe, which was experiencing very similar economic and infrastructural "adjustment" after 1989, experienced its sharpest fall in at the beginning of the 1980s (trends which continued after 1989).

It is important to note that these are not the only cases that appear to debunk theories of demographic transition modeled around an assumed positive relationship between socio-economic "development" and lowering fertility. A number of low-income countries in the global south have experienced significant drops in fertility, despite continued high mortality, relatively low GDPs and a scandalously unequal distribution of wealth.[45] In short, the notion of any strict and consistent relationship between economic growth, levels of wealth and fertility appear to have been disproven in practice.[46] While this problem is certainly an enormously complex and controversial one in economic and demographic literature, the consensus at the moment seems to be that there is no consensus about how to interpret the relationship between economic "development" in the former Soviet-Union and the sharp decline in fertility in these states. Given the extent to which modernisation theories of demographic transition continue to linger in the assumptions of demographers and development theorists, the apparent lack of a methodological overhauling of demography that would respond in a proportionate way to this kind of empirical challenge – and it should be said that this is not the only one acknowledged by demographers – is surprising. From the limited, outsider perspective of a discipline for which a Marxist critique of political-economy remains active, the lack of any account of the effects of a primitive accumulation in the region is disturbing and underlines the extent to which the growing importance of "cultural and ideational factors"

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[45] Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brazil and China are each excellent, though clearly also distinct, examples.

[46] For different aspects of the argument for this, see Greenhalgh, "The Social Consturction of Population Science"; Caldwell, "The Failure of Theories of Social and Economic Change"; Caldwell and Schindlmayr, "Explanations of the Fertility Crisis"; Paul Demeny. "Social Science and Population Policy."

in theories of demographic behaviour deserves to be treated with a great deal of suspicion.

*Prologue***: First Comes Food**

In 2004, Tarr contributed the film *Prologue* to a collection of shorts commissioned by the New York Film Festival. *Prologue* provides a useful distillation of the characteristic features and the formal preoccupations of Tarr's later films that align my reading of their investment in a mode of cinematic realism with the broader, biopolitical features of a region in the midst of an unprecedented governmental and demographic transition. Tarr's short film is comprised of one long take, a lateral tracking shot that follows the faces of people waiting on a sidewalk. The waiting figures are captured in profile, facing forward and off-screen to the left of the frame. Tarr's camera movement remains characteristically slow and uneven; the weathered faces, bearing unmistakably features of ethnic Magyar, seem neither interested in, nor unaware of the camera that passes by them on the street, moving in the same direction of their gazes. The film lasts almost six minutes and closes as the camera reaches the end of what we realize is a queue: an open window and a woman distributing bread and soup to each in line. Here, the camera pauses and remains motionless, watching the woman repeat the same series of gestures, handing over a Styrofoam container, then a piece of bread and making a single mark with a pen with her other hand. The fact that the only commercial release of *Prologue* was as part of a DVD collection of short films entitled "Visions of Europe" suggests a blunt kind of socio-political paratext, touching on the economic dependence of Hungary, a country

that had (and has) yet to demonstrate the social and financial balance-sheets that would gain it full economic status as an EU member state. Yet, as with the whale of *Werckmeister Harmonies*, there is an aesthetic problem being addressed here.

Tarr's films are full of experiments in crowd photography – one will recall the various arrangements of bodies in the square in *Werckmeister Harmonies*, or the photography of bar interiors in *Damnation*. (In fact, there is a long tracking shot in *Damnation* almost identical to the shot that comprises *Prologue*, this time scanning across forward-facing crowds, looking out from the doors and windows of a bar, apparently waiting for the rain to pass.) In *Prologue*, the camera movement seems to stage a kind of visual allegory that attempts to reconstruct the representational dilemma of representing mass social phenomenon within the limits of the narrative film form: the camera moves laterally through space, presenting a sequence of faces that, in the slowness of the camera movement and the stillness of the line, each appear at once absorbingly unique and as utter repetition; there is, in this filmed construction, a beautiful image of the statistical ontology of the social, slowly developing this meaningful series through repetition. The movement of the camera follows the creeping movement of the waiting faces, but toward what we cannot see: the lateral movement of the camera, close framing and the uniform gaze of the queued figures all work to heighten the effect of off-screen space toward which the camera and the queue move at different speeds. The attention of the film's spectator is effectively split between an anticipation of the end of the queue and the faces that fill the frame. The slow, halting tracking of the camera leads us, after three or four minutes, to begin to look for some sign of off-frame goal in the

slow repetition of faces. The expressionless faces of the actors and the framing not only

obscures the goal toward which the line creeps, but any certainty that there is a beginning

or end to the line; instead, the camera seems to merely count off face after face, with no

end in sight, like a kind of Kafkaesque enumerator.

Fig. 3.3 *Prologue*

Were Tarr to have not revealed the bread line at the end, there would indeed be

something Kafkaesque, metaphysical, and almost religious about the procession. Instead,

the blind spot toward which the camera and the crowd moves is bluntly revealed: bread,

soup, food. And while Tarr thus provides a concrete end toward which the line moves,

there is no gaze backward and no sense of how far back the line stretches. What, one

wonders, is this a "Prologue" to? While everything points to an irony in this title, it also

obliquely recalls the order of Brecht's dictum from *Three Penny Opera*: "First comes

food, then comes morality" ("Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral"). There is

also the undeniable black smirk in the suggestion of a prologue without a film, or, returning to Brecht, of a prologue to a genuine ethical aesthetics – that may, the film seems to say, never arrive. This suggestion of a kind of eternal false start, in its turn, amplifies another, visual allusion, this time to inter-textual repetition of the wet faces in the prison yard of Miklós Jancsó's *Szegénylegények* ("The Poor Youth," distributed in English as *The Round Up*, 1965). One of the opening shots of the prison-yard in Jancsó's film, it mirrors the *mise-en-scene* and camera movement of Tarr's film with startling precision.

The faces in Jancsó's film are those of the Magyar prisoners interned following the failed 1848 rebellion against Austrian rule; taken together with the hungry characters (and audiences) that Brecht staged amidst the financial ruin of the 20s and 30s, these accumulated allusions provide some specific historical substance to the sense of familiarity and repetition that characterize Tarr's contribution to a "Vision of Europe". What is perhaps clearer than this historical allusion to the 'eternal return' of the breadline – a phenomenon often referred to today as "the business cycle" – is the extent to which Tarr's short adopts the sense of the extension of the image's minimalist construction that we also find in the concision of Brecht's maxim and the choreography of faces, objects, landscapes in Jancsó. In praise of Tarr's short film, Yvette Biró writes:

> With the deliberate repetition we are led to feel the force of habit, accepting the too familiar circumstances, to the level of indifference. And precisely at this point we dig deeper into the quotidian way of life. An unshakable, rigid order dominates their destiny, like a weird entity, under which they all become tiny nonentities…*Prologue* is an exceptional example to fathom the contradictory content of the small and the "big," the multifarious and the reduced. The resolute and consistently limited frame challenges its interests; curiosity growing with its

passing vision. It is no wonder that the highly textured, rhythmically articulated space can so successfully elevate its tiny story. (Biró, "Confined Space")

Fig. 3.4 Members of the cooperative, with their belongings on the road in *Satantango.*

While the "existential" poetics that Biró draws out of her reflections on Tarr's films seems to fall short, for me, of tapping the full significance of this short film, she does pinpoint the feature that I wish to consider more closely. What is exemplary about this short film in Tarr's *oeuvre* is the extent to which it crystallizes Tarr's capacity to conjure what Lukács would call a kind of *typicality* not through character, but in the sheer, deliberate weight of the duration of the shot and the minimal features it captures. While for Lukács, the strength of any genuine realist novel was measurable and distinguished by its capacity to produce "typical" characters who might condense and embody the wider social contradictions of an age, here this transference (what Biró calls the "elevation" of the story beyond itself) is effected through the repetition of the *mise-en-scene*, the pace of

the camera, temporal extension of the shot. The development of character functions here only through its negation: the actors remain dumb, nearly immobile and innumerable; beyond typical, a realist characterization is rendered now simply a repetition, a pure quantification, each marked with a check on a pad of paper as they receive their bread and walk out of the film.

While the plot of Tarr's films must depend upon characters just as most narrative fiction does, characterization plays a very minor role in the development of his stories. Indeed, to generalize across the narratives in the films discussed here, the characteristic development of Tarr's characters is toward a state of abject quantification. The seven and a half hour narrative arc of *Satantango* can be fairly accurately summarized as the slow process by which the inhabitants of a failing commune slowly metamorphose from characters to an undifferentiated mass, without means, home or even community. Though the film begins with individual characters, engaged in vaguely developed domestic conflicts, the narrative ends with a huddle of bodies on the side of the road, being counted, selected and arbitrarily dispersed again.

This levelling reduction of the characters' mannerisms, ambitions and preoccupations points, in its form, to something more than nihilism. The resonance of the Brechtian evacuation of moral imperatives in art and politics is, for me, suggestive. The reduction of the expected play of character and conflict to the huddling of dumb bodies, which takes paradigmatic form in *Satantango*, functions above all to establish an ambient tone, background or staging for the cinematography of the film in which one encounters the primary substance and the foregrounded action of Tarr's later films. As Harun

Farocki's film-essay, *Workers Leaving a Factory* (1995) suggests, there is a rich, buried visual history of the demographic features of capitalist production. As Farocki demonstrates, it is possible to reconstruct a history of visual culture through the recurrent image of the multitudinous unemployed (what Marx called the "surplus population"). While criticism of Marxism's political economic writings for their undervaluation of reproduction and their devaluation of demographic features of capital accumulation is perhaps more relevant today than ever, Marxist cultural theory lacks an established means by which to articulate the relationship between the changing mode of the *reproduction* of a population and the aesthetic and cultural field.

What would it mean to suggest an aesthetic of demographic decline? This is the question or proposition which I'd like to return to by way of concluding this chapter. How would such a proposition fit into existing models of aesthetic theory, the sociology of culture and the political history of form? What are the political implications and strategic pitfalls for absorbing a thicker conception of social reproduction, one that would account for the demographic optics, function and effects of power that define the current conjuncture, into a specifically Marxist problematic of culture?

Locating the particular form of realism that one encounters in Tarr's films next to the condition of demographic decline that is taking place in Hungary and Eastern Europe suggests a tentative connection that can be drawn between cinematic time and the bare rhythm of social reproduction. While I have sought to open up the specific ways that a form of demographic awareness hovers in the persistent narrative and visual reduction to a quantified assembly of bodies in these films, it is the less certain, but perhaps more

theoretically generative ground of the representation of time upon which I want to focus. There is an interesting way in which the paradoxes of a temporal mimesis with which I began this chapter return here to give some more specific shape to the notion of an aesthetic realism responsive to changes in the mode of reproduction. Such a proposition contains the danger of slipping into a bad moralizing (and vulgar pro-natalist) equivalence between, say, the generally bleak tone of Tarr's stories and a society without children. It is thus critical to stress that I am not trying to suggest any direct relationship between a declining population and temporal slowness of Tarr's films. A moral register, which intuits or assumes some corruption in the decline of a population should be precluded by the conviction that it is only within the frame of the imperative of growth that is axiomatic to any (past or present) regime of capital accumulation that we can think the significance of population decline. It is the fact that it is within such a volatile expansionary zone for capital today – Russia and Eastern Europe generally – that we find the unprecedented evidence of an absolute decline of a whole population that, rather, seems the right frame within which to pose this connection of an aesthetic to a demographic condition. At the very least, the fact that this "naturally" shrinking population appears at the site of one of the more rapacious examples of primitive accumulation in recent decades seems to run counter to any recognizable accumulation mechanism of capital, prompting yet further speculation that we are witness to a new form of the reproduction of capital. Whatever this new form may be, that population decline indexes an emergent form of social contradiction seems likely.

In stark contrast with the easy formal analogies (with Tarkovsky, Sokurov, Angelopoulos and other *auteurs* of the long-take) that critics tend to depend on when responding to Béla Tarr's films, Jacques Rancière, in his review of *Satantango*, writes

> there is [nothing] formalist about this film; on the contrary, we could even name this the last of the great historical materialist films. The sensory [effect] does not work here as it does in Tarkovsky or Sokurov, where we are dropped into the universe of the spiritual. Here, the ruined church bells are only being pulled by an idiot. The long fixed shots and the slowness of camera movement introduces no world of the spirit. They hold us firmly in material reality of a history that Hungarian spectators of the film will recognize: a decomposing agricultural cooperative, a scam promising a better life [...]. (*Rancière*, "Béla Tarr" [my translation])

Rancière's comment, while broadly consonant with my own reading, is undoubtedly correct in seeing Tarr's films as engaged with the movement between two failed systems, the evacuation of one Utopian project and the suspect promises of another. Indeed, what is astounding is that Rancière's point comes as a corrective to the typical reception of Tarr's project as essentially formalist. While a different account of these films might begin with their negotiation of the interregnum between two orders, my interest here has been to show that the demographic features of this moment represent an important dimension of what Rancière accurately names their historical materialism. Stressing again the pitfalls opened up by introducing population behaviour into any social or cultural theory does not discount the possibility that demographic crisis discourse, almost despite itself, might provide a powerful index of emergent contradictions. If the contemporary moment is defined, in part, by symptoms of the biopolitical subsumption of "life itself" as a site of domination, exploitation and the expanded reproduction of capital, it would, indeed, seem necessary today for a materialist aesthetics capable of responding

to these conditions to take account of the way that the narration of population, mass fertility behaviour and the statistical logic of people shape the way we imagine social relations and make them sensible to one another.

Chapter 3

Population Aging and the Cinematic Lateness of Capitalism

The world's population is beginning to grow older at a rate and on a scale that is historically unprecedented. The United Nations' 2002 report on World Population Aging puts the fact succinctly: "Increases in the proportions of older persons (60 years or older) are being accompanied by declines in the proportions of the young (under age 15). By 2050, the number of older persons in the world will exceed the number of young for the first time in history" (United Nations, *World Population Aging* xxvii). The trending evidence summarized here makes clear what has long been accepted fact in the population studies community. In these circles, the process of population aging, which we are today seeing the beginnings of, is widely recognized as ranking with the black plague and the industrial revolution as an epochal event in the demographic history of human life on the planet. Between 1950 and 2000, the percentage of the world's population over the age of 65 grew from 8.3% to 10.1%; in the next span of fifty years, from 2000 to 2050, demographic projections suggest we will see this number swell to just over 21% of the world's population (ibid xviii). The effects of a transformation of this magnitude upon all aspects of the organization of social life on the planet will likely only be apparent retrospectively. This, of course, has not prevented the emergence of a small industry of alarming prognostication about the apocalyptic future of aging societies that began with the World Bank's 1994 report "Averting the Age Crisis" and has ballooned

into countless high-profile articles and works of population non-fiction.[47] We do know that the broad demographic transformations that have led to population aging – namely: increased life expectancy and lower total fertility rate – began to show marked transition as early as the late mid-18th century in some European countries, that by the mid-1960s, almost all advanced industrial societies had reached a point where life expectancy had increased and fertility levels had dropped to a level that would lead inevitably toward an older society and that over the last decades of the twentieth numerous developing nations and regions (China, South East Asia, some Latin America nations) made rapid transition to low birth rates and toward the aging populations that are, at the beginning of the 2000s, already apparent across Western and Southern Europe, Japan and, to a lesser extent, North America.[48] Given the scale and significance of this process and the extent to which it entails such an overdetermined synthesis of economic, sociological, cultural and biological causes and effects, there is a remarkable dearth of accounts of this process that address the *cultural* problem of population aging at this systemic level. If population aging is as global and as epochal a development as is widely claimed, we are surprisingly without a clue about its cultural or symbolic register.

One way to begin the work of addressing this lack, I want to argue, is with a recognition that discourses about population behaviour function as a powerful mode of

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[47] For a representative sample, see: Peterson, *Grey Dawn*; Longman, *The Empty Cradle* and *Born To Pay*; "A World of Methuselahs;""Aging in the Rich World;" "Ageing issue 'ticking time bomb'". For criticism of these views, see *The Overselling of Population Aging*; Mullan, *The Imaginary Time Bomb.*

[48] The process of demographic transition is a long (indeed ongoing) and complex process. It is neither uniform across time and place, nor are there models for its causes that explain different national or regional instances and trajectories. For a sample of currently influential demographic assessments, see: Ariès, "Two Successive Motivations"; Caldwell, "Toward a Restatement"; Galor and Weil, "Population, Technology, and Growth"; Lesthaeghe, "The Second Demographic Transition".

representing a social totality. To speak about population aging, in particular, is to make a complex claim about social time and its political ontology, one that rests in part on the projective inclination of statistical demography itself and, in part, upon the temporal trajectory plotted by the idea of age and aging. It is along these lines that it makes sense to approach the discourse of population aging today in terms of an ideological assemblage or project, incomprehensibly vast and overdetermined in itself, but bearing certain identifiable effects at the level of the symbolic. The approach to the cultural or symbolic effects of population aging that I propose in what follows varies from the tendency in cultural studies of aging and "humanistic aging studies" insofar as I want to begin from a point that refuses the common, if for the most part implicit, dissociation of what are read as the cultural expressions of "the aging process" – whether visual, narrative, architectural, gestural, etc. – from the discursive formation of the story of "population aging." In other words, while the recently intensified critical interest in literary and visual representations of aging and later life is full of appeals to the relevance of this work "in a time of aging populations," I want to propose that we take the epochal claim of population aging not as the *excuse* for a cultural theory of aging, but rather as itself the *object* of such work.

While social and political theorists today are likely to nominate globalization or the environmental effects of capitalist growth as the most significant process defining the horizon of the political, even a passing glance at the current and projected measure of population aging registers the extent to which neither of these processes can escape some careful consideration of demographic aging. Part of what can be so confounding about

public political discourse today is the degree to which the narratives that give coherence
to public debate – for instance, globalization or ecological catastrophe – pinpoint the
novelty or eventful aspect of our contemporary moment as having always already been
there. Insofar as globalization, climate change, or peak oil are imagined as eventful, it is
not in terms of their sudden becoming, discovery or arrival, but rather in terms of their
continuity with the past and of maturation through which they make urgent, epochal
claims upon the present. Paradoxically, then, what appears eventful about these
macrological narratives is their continuity with, or concretion of what already was.
Whether it is the historiographical acrobatics of the theorists of globalization, applying
increasingly fine-grained distinctions to find the novelty of social, economic and cultural
processes that most agree stretch back centuries, or the uneasy (and very qualified!)
consensus shared by representatives of the opposing poles of public debate over climate
change, who both tend to agree that there is fundamentally "nothing new" about the
ecological effects to industrial production. Whatever the nature of the critical or
normative procedure that follows from these discourses, everyone today can seem to
agree that capitalism contains an impulse to territorial expansion and that this growth has
tended to produce destructive and traumatic transformative effects for the societies and
ecosystems it happens to enclose in the process. However we conceptualize the origins,
causal relations or consequences of these processes, they remain the most recognizable
signs of progress we possess.

What may distinguish the problem of population aging from both the narratives of
globalization and ecological deterioration is the extent to which it seems to represent a

definite interruption, rather than an expansion or exacerbation of what are essentially expected features of capitalist growth. Set against these more recognizable imaginaries of social totality today, population aging represents a global imagining of society distinguished by a dramatic incommensurability with any modern rationality of social time or progress. To quickly explore this, one need simply consider the manner in which population aging is distinguished in its temporal structure from absolute population decline, as I discussed in the previous chapter with reference to Eastern-Europe societies over the last two decades. While similar changes in demographic behaviour - specifically dwindling fertility rates – are determining features of both population decline and population aging, in the case of the latter, the absolute size of the population continues to grow and, in almost all national cases, will continue to grow just as it comes to contain fewer youth and more and more elderly people. Today, if it is possible to except instances of war and epidemic diseases like HIV/AIDS, population decline describes a condition in which a nation or region experiences sub-replacement fertility rates associated with population aging *unaccompanied* by the extended lifespans associated with the advanced health care, welfare services and higher per capita income typically exclusive (if in different combinations and degrees) to advanced industrial nations. While a good demographer would insist on a far more rigorously nuanced account of the intersection of fertility behaviour and life expectancy with reproductive technologies, economic development, socio-cultural context and other factors, a simplified sense of what decline signifies is sufficient for my purposes, insofar as it highlights its essential distinction

from population aging at the level of the temporal logic operative in its narration of a given social situation.

Considered in terms of its temporal structure or logic, the prospect of an absolute decline in population, while reversing the forward propulsion of modernity and the classical momentum of capital accumulation, remains contained and structurally necessary within the parameters of the productive-destructive mechanics of capitalist progress. In other words, it functions as the necessary conceptual, or potential negation of the coincidence of population-growth and expanded capital accumulation. This is apparent at the level of economic thought, where the imagination of a natural numeric decline of a population looms so large as both a hopeful or utopian and a terrifying or dystopian eventuality (see chapter 1). It is, however, even more profoundly true at the level of the symbolic, where from the earliest moments of European industrialization, decline and entropy are as powerfully axiomatic to the temporal condition of modernity as the ideology of progress that remains the (ever less-sustainable) condition for the normative health of our economic system.[49] The so-called "spatial turn" that accompanies the discourse of postmodernity at the end of the twentieth century enables a transposition of the temporal dialectic of modernity to the spatial dimension. While this transposition introduces crucial ways of reconceiving economic and cultural forms, the

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[49] Alongside the preoccupation with the paradoxical temporality and the "creative destruction" of capitalist growth among theorists of modernity and crisis, Mary-Ann Doane's has provided a brilliant genealogy of the origins of the "paradoxical relation" founding the modern conception of energy and crystallized in the apparent contradictions in the first and second laws of thermodynamics that stipulate at once the infinite conservation and the inevitable dissipation of energy in time. The introduction of a modern conception of entropy in the Second Law of Thermodynamics, Doane argues, injects the theory of energy with a directional temporality, which fuse with and enable the dialectical view of historical progress and historical decline. See Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*.

binaries of modernity remain, for the most part, in place; the relationships that constitute a capitalist society, whether conceived temporally or spatially, remain measurable in terms of increase/decrease, expansion/constriction (cf. Harvey, "Space as a Keyword" 283-293).

Set against the paradigmatically modern temporal dialectic of progress/decline, the crisis-discourse of population aging gives shape to a figure of social time that cuts unevenly across the structuring polarities of growth/decline, expansion/contraction, more/less that calibrate our capacities to imagine social futures. The idea that 'the future is growing older' captures the paradoxical kernel of an imagining of the social time of aging. A discourse of population aging describes both *and* neither population growth and/nor population decline: today's aging societies continue to increase in absolute size, but inevitably decline in their imagined capacity for industry, for productivity, for economic growth. (I insist that this is an *imagined* capacity, but it is not precisely a fictitious one, a problem I will return to later.) In this sense, what is split apart and exposed in contemporary alarm about aging populations is the presumed identity, or at least the relative fixity of the relationship between the size and utility of a population, or, to push ahead of myself a bit, the identity of population and labour in relation to capital. Indeed, to contemplate the implications of an imagination of the future as aging exposes the epistemic fragility illuminates a wide range of assumptions guaranteed by the untroubled identity of youth and futurity, crystallized in the cliché "the children are the future," or in what Lee Edelman, in a quite different register, has provocatively called "reproductive futurism" (Edelman 16-17).

By beginning with such an abstract discussion of the social time entailed in a discourse of population aging, my intent is to reframe some of the more commonly used ways of addressing population aging and in a way that makes it available as an object for cultural inquiry. While this broader heuristic agenda circumscribes what follows, I want to focus these problems and questions through an exploration of the contemporary significance of the figure of the aging subject, specifically as it circulates in recent cinematic attempts to narrate the life world of the pensioner. I want, in short, to attempt to recast population aging as a representational problem and one which, I argue, is particularly apparent in the past decade or so of world cinema. The rush of films devoted to pensioner stories during the past ten years can only be described as a global phenomenon, one which projects a commonality, illusory or not, of the experience of later life and retirement across distinct cultural, economic and demographic situations. Denys Arcand's *Les Invasion Barbares* (2003), Cristi Puiu's *Moartea domnului Lazarescu* (2005), Naomi Kawase's *Mogari no Mori* (2007), Korean film maker Chung-Ryoul Lee's *Wonangsori* (2008) and Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Loong Boonmee raleuk chat* (2010) represent but a sample of the best known films produced over the past decade aimed primarily at rendering a 'portrait of later life'. Despite emerging from sometimes radically different social, political and economic contexts and tapping into very different generic and thematic content, each of these films unfolds as a cinematic treatment of what Constance Rooke, writing of its literary form, calls a *Vollendungsroman*, a "winding up" story (Rooke 244-246). Presenting an inverted mirror image of the more familiar *Bildungsroman*, which narrates youth and the process of the

socialization of a subject, the *Vollengunsroman* typically tells the story of the exit of a character from social life. The function of retirement within this narrative genre adds more specificity to its content, not only providing a convenient temporal starting point in a recognizable life course, but also providing a thematic coherence embedded in a range of possible anxieties and conflicts that face a character when her labour is no longer socially necessary.

To the quick list of films above one can add numerous more popular examples from the past decade. It is, however, at the sanctified pinnacle of world or transnational cinema that one discovers the most compelling evidence of a marked tendency to privilege this particular story or genre of film in the recent past in a way that is itself worth examining. The extent to which this production of a transnational narrative of aging has been possible is tied up with the simultaneous solidification of the new networks of production, consumption, judgement and valorization contained in the slippery notion of transnational cinema.[50] All of the films mentioned above, for instance, have garnered nominations and awards from European and American film festivals, alongside less internationally renowned successes from Hollywood studios such as *The Straight Story* (David Lynch, 1999), *The Savages* (Tamara Jenkins, 2007), *About Schmitt* (Alexander Payne, 2002) and *Grand Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2008). To the US popular films, we could add further minor successes, popular in their respective national audiences, like *Babí Léto* (Vladimír Michálek, 2001) or *O'Horten* (Bent Hamer, 2007). It

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[50] A substantial and rapidly growing bibliography of relevant scholarship exists. See for example: Andrew, "An Atlas of World Cinema;" Farahmand, "Disentangling the International Festival Circuit"; Valck, "Screening" the Future of Film Festivals?"; Turan, *Sundance to Sarajevo*; Valck, *Film Festivals*.

is certainly possible to look back and find a long tradition of great post-retirement or *Vollengunsroman* films – the list would surely include F.W. Murnau's *Der Lezte Mann* (1924), Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto D* (1952) and Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957). I am less interested in making a film history case for the special claim of this thematic preoccupation in cinematic production today, being rather more struck by the confluence of transformations – political, infrastructural and ideological – that might be seen to shape its contemporary social significance.[51] Approached, as I've proposed, as part of a larger ideological project, these films must be read through and against transformations to the material conditions of aging and retirement themselves. In this sense, the hypothesis with which I begin is that the pensioner story, as a privileged aspect of an emergent field of transnational cinematic production, can be read today as a record of a wholesale reconstruction of old age or later life, as apparent at the level of the subject – the figure of the individual pensioner – as at the level of the economic and epistemic whole – the dominant logic of population, of an aging work force and of the lateness of capital.

Pursuing this line of inquiry, my intention in what follows is as much an attempt to make definite connections between a population aging and a wider economic and cultural moment as it is to consider the ways in which this poses a representational problem for cultural studies and critical theory. In particular, my analysis returns insistently to the ways in which attempts to narrate, envision and make aging meaningful

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[51] A quick survey of the major American and international awards over the past thirty years, however, leave little doubt that there has been at the very least a swell in the number of award winning films devoted primarily to the theme of later life.

today struggle with a seeming incapacity to forge points of articulation between the subjective and systemic, or demographic view of aging. The first part of this chapter offers the briefest sketch of the way in which aging can begin to be seen as crucial for grasping the contemporary moment of capitalism, particularly insofar as the fact of aging societies informs an understanding of the process of financialization. This, in turn, leads me to a contrasting account of the trends in the way in which the emergent study of aging in the humanities has tended to engage aging as a problem. While this field of study, of so-called humanistic aging studies, remains in its earliest stages of development, its claim to respond to demographic developments tends toward an apprehension of aging as a problem of marginalized subjectivities, or in terms of an ethics of aging. This dominant theoretical tendency within humanistic aging studies, I argue, risks an occlusion of a systemic problem of aging and, as such, limits the possibility of realizing a materialist cultural theory of aging. Finally, I turn to cinema, a field of cultural production where, as I've briefly noted, a new ideology of aging registers with particular urgency.

Population Aging and the Time of Finance Capital

Part of what makes the demographic changes that undergird my analysis so complicated is the way that they are embedded within wholesale transformations of the regime of capital accumulation that have taken place over the past thirty years. The relationship between population aging and changes at the level of the social reproduction of capital – i.e. the organic composition of capital, the form and function of production, the distribution of wealth and labour by gender, geography and age, and the role of the state

and supranational institutions in all of these – are far from autonomous developments. Indeed, together these two processes touch on almost every aspect of the current shape of the present relative to its earlier moments. To focus on what is arguably the most charged site upon which demographic aging and capital accumulation converge, a quick overview of the entanglement of pensions in post-industrial, financialized economies provides a concrete context for questions that I want to ask about how we might assess concurrent shifts in the cultural field.[52]

The recomposition of the capitalist world system launched in the 1970s begins, as I demonstrate in my first chapter, with immense anxiety surrounding overpopulation and new mutations of old fears about the sustainability of growth and the carrying capacity of the Earth. In retrospect, part of what makes this historical conjuncture so interesting today is how little, or in what a convoluted way, its dreams of demographic catastrophe went unrealized in the world that emerged out of this moment of crisis. The image of a threatening, unsustainable population of surplus bodies that sought to express and contain the economic crises of the 1970s, rather than ushering in an expansion of labour intensive production, was accompanied instead by a steady movement of core capitalist economies

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[52] Capitalism and the revolutions in social production through which it renews and reproduces itself have always been fundamentally tied to demographic behaviour. The development of modern historiography, through the British social historians from the 1950s onward, the contributions of the Annales school in France, the emergence of Anglo-American cliometrics and the subsequent development of histories of world systems have all been shaped, at different moments, around the question of the role population plays in the development of social production.[52] Ferdinand Braudel's germinal study, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, for example, takes the increase of population during the long 16th century as a means of theorizing the pre-conditions for the expansion of capitalist social relations[52]; the methodological problems that the determining influence Braudel and others placed upon demographic growth has reverberated through historiography, most notably the long debate about the relative causal effect of demographic conditions for the European transition from feudal to capitalistic societies evident in the work of historians like M.M. Postan, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and (in a famously critical mode) Robert Brenner. See Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World* (especially, 326-328, 402-418); *The Brenner Debate,* Eds. Aston and Philpin.

away from traditional industrial production and toward managerial, financial, and communication industries (cf. Brenner; Duménil and Lévy; Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*; Lipsietz, *Mirages and Miracles*). While new technologies for describing and managing populations come into being through the tumult of this transition period, the migration of capital further and further from investment in traditional production to increasingly virtual modes of speculation and the accompanying dismantlement of labour politics by neoliberal consensus of the 1980s and 1990s also fragments and complexifies the familiar, industrial political economy of population to the degree that its relevance itself – of, for instance, the Marxian category of an industrial reserve army – is put in question. In other words, as the hegemonic instruments of capital accumulation and the production of value appear increasingly abstract and delinked from material production, the behaviour of populations – their numeric growth or decline, in particular, and an anxiety about integrating these populations into a familiar productive role in industrial production – appears gradually more external to economic processes.

Brett Nielson, one of the very few critics who have attempted to provide theoretical synthesis of the relationship between globalization and population aging, has recently argued that, particularly following the financial crisis that began in 2008, a critical analysis of the transition to a new regime of accumulation that begins in the 1970s must do more to acknowledge the degree to which "pension funds were at the leading edge of this process" (Nielson, "Aging and Globalization" 352). The precipitous growth and structural transformation of pension savings and pension funds that begins during this period of crisis provides a fascinating nexus of the contradictions in this historical

development. Peter Ferdinand Drucker's 1976 book *The Pension Fund Revolution* was among the first texts to identify the disjuncture between the new role of pension funds and the then-existent parameters for understanding capital accumulation. Drucker's widely read book argued that

> if "socialism" is defined as "ownership of the means of production by the workers" [...], then the United States is the first truly "Socialist" country. Through their pension funds, employees of American business today own at least 25 percent of its equity capital, which is more than enough for control…by 1985 (probably sooner), they will own at least 50 – if not 60 – percent of equity capital. Ten years later, or well before the turn of the century, their holdings should exceed around two-thirds of the equity capital (that is, the common shares) plus a major portion – perhaps 40 percent – of the debt capital (bonds, debentures, and notes) of the American economy. Inflation can only speed up this process. (Drucker 1)

Drucker's early projection of the growth of pension investment and its broader political, economic and cultural implications are illuminating, both in what he got right and in what he got wrong, or was simply unable to see. Despite the broad accuracy of Drucker's study in identifying the long trend toward absolute growth of pension funds and, in a general way, of the economic command pension funds would come to possess, the social and political consequences that he imagined to follow from this growth have not materialized. By the end of the twentieth century, assets in some individual pension funds had grown large enough to compete and even exceed the value of the largest multinational corporations.[53] A recent and widely cited survey of global pension markets placed the value of pension fund assets (a narrow, yet illustrative measure) in the 13 largest national

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[53] "By 2000 the largest US money managers, ranked by asset value, were Fidelity Investments with $1,074 billion under management, Barclays Global Investors ($784 billion), State Street Global Advisers ($681 billion). [...] Around the time of these valuations General Electric, the world's most valuable company, had a market worth of $460 billion and Microsoft a market capitalization of $353 billion" (Blackburn, *Banking on Death* 121).

markets at $26.5 trillion in 2010 (*Global Pension Assets Study: 2011*). Though it is difficult to put such an immense figure into perspective, by the end of 2010, the total value of sovereign wealth funds was estimated at $4.2 trillion and the immense pool of foreign debt owned by China stood at approximately $2.6 trillion ("Sovereign Wealth Fund Ranking"). Perhaps more significant than the sheer size of pension funds, however, is the fact that, following the haemorrhaging of an estimated 21% of asset value from global pension funds in 2008 alone, in 2010 and with a record high of over $25 trillion in assets, the very great majority of these pension funds remain globally underfunded (Kollewe and Inman).

As Robin Blackburn and other critical historians of pensions have insisted, the scale or quantitative growth of pension funds has proven less significant than the changes to the way that pensions are funded, structured and managed. With the privatization of pension funds and their integration into new circuits of financial speculation – securities, derivatives, hedge funds – pensions not only become complexified to a degree that has rendered policy holders passively dependant on the expertise and good intensions of fund managers, but also, more disturbingly, they functioned to invest the personal earnings of working people in the maintenance of monetarist fiscal ideology and the traditional interests of a capitalist class. Coinciding with the emergence of a new dominance of finance capitalism, the potential for the democratization and redistribution of ownership that Drucker saw in the growth of pensions has thus been realized, instead, as a

distribution of *risk*, in which an individual or a family's savings for their later years becomes effectively leveraged against and subsumed within the volatility of the market.[54]

The complex typology and accounting rationales of different models of funding and managing pensions – of private, public, basic and supplementary pension schemes – are famous. Within the complex variations and variegations of pension schemes, however, is a broad distinction between schemes structured around guaranteed return, often managed by the state, on one hand, and, on the other, schemes managed by private investment firms, aimed at maximizing returns through portfolios in the stock market, securities and derivatives. This split has been widened by the dramatic growth of "defined-contribution" pension funds – schemes like, for example, 401k plans in the United States – that are structured around a defined payment scheme into a plan for which the benefits upon retirement are undefined and determined by the performance of the market and the fund's investment portfolio – and the gradual retreat of "defined-benefit" schemes, which guarantee a certain amount upon retirement. In his study, *The Cold War in Welfare*, Richard Minns traces the parallel growth of privately managed, defined-contribution schemes and the re-emergence of finance capitalism. Minns argument, subsequently taken up by others, in sum, is that the late twentieth century story of rapid growth in pensions is not, as Drucker imagined in the mid-1970s, the story of creeping "pension socialism", but rather a crucial thread in the larger story of the mutation of the composition of capital and the regime of accumulation. For Minns, from

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[54] A much longer account of this process would be required to give a sense of the unevenness that underpins this general trend when considered globally. For a succinct summary see Nielson, "Ageing and Globalization" 350-352.

the first signs of the breakdown of the Bretton-Woods' regulatory restrictions on international movement of capital, pension funds are tied to the growing dominance of monetarist economic policy, increasing speculation in property and currency markets and, in general, the so-called financialization of capital over the latter part of the twentieth century. Minns writes

> Whatever the history of financial empires, manias, investment, money markets and so on, something rather novel has occurred which few writers take into account. In the world of what I have perhaps melodramatically characterized as competing welfare blocs, international financial flows do not emanate solely from the financial transfers arising from trade or corporate surpluses. Financial flows also spring from how we pay for the maintenance of a large and growing proportion of the population as defined by a certain stage in life. Indeed, the role of pension funds suggests a new paradigm of economic analysis whereby 'social' provision through flows of finance for income security has augmented international financial flows. 'Social security capital' is now as important as other sources of capital, if not more so as more and more people are encouraged in one way or another to save privately for their retirement. It is a key element in fuelling the expansion of financial markets. (Minns 33)

In repositioning pensions, not as a symptom or side-effect, but as a crucial determining condition of the late twentieth century's deregulation and globalization of the flow of capital, Minn's analysis, subsequently extended in Robin Blackburn's two book-length studies,[55] has profound implications not only for the way in which pensions are situated in relation to finance capitalism's reproduction, but also for the significance of population aging and how it might be considered as a problem for the study of its culture.

While the cultural life of pensions themselves, like population aging, have remained largely uncommented upon in by cultural theorists, one of the places that this discussion is beginning to take place is in the critical attention (energized by the on-going

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[55] *Age Shock: How Finance Is Failing Us* (2007), and *Banking On Death, Or Investing in Life: The History and Future of Pensions* (2004).

financial crisis today) to the relationship between finance capital and culture. The cultural theory of financialization that has emerged in the past decade helps to put into a clearer focus the recent historical and heuristic claims about the significance of the growth and reform of pension funds and the aging populations that have accompanied this. Finance capital, in essence, describes money capital (sometimes "bank capital"), as opposed to "real capital" or capital goods (i.e. capital already invested in production or on its way, as a commodity, toward being realized again as money). Finance is, strictly speaking, a necessary element of any capitalist economic system. Following Rudolph Hilferding's *Finance Capital* (1910), the term finance capital has been used more specifically to describe the moment that, as industry becomes more and more dependent on bank credit and financial investment, finance capital itself becomes gradually delinked from industrial production, generating increasingly complex instruments for generating profit on a stock of capital at an ever greater remove or abstraction from industry and real property.

Attempts to periodize the development of capitalism as an economic system over the course of the twentieth century have come to view the changing role and composition of finance capitalism as key to understanding the cycles and development of capitalism. Giovanni Arrighi's, *The Long Twentieth Century* provides one of the most compelling and influential periodizing accounts of capitalism and (long) twentieth century in particular in terms of the cyclical pattern of finance capital's structural dominance and retreat as a mode of capital accumulation. This periodizing account proved particularly useful for explaining the shift between two very different regimes of production and

capital accumulation between the 1960s and 1980s. From this point of view, a wide range of political-economic transformations that take place over this period (see chapter 1) are made legible within a broader historical framework. The increasing dominance of monetarist fiscal policy and the associated push toward the reduction and privatization of social welfare institutions at the state level, the new technologies of transnationally distributed and flexible production, the institution of a supranational consensus founded in a floating currency exchange, and the gradual abolition of inter-national barriers to capital investment: by the end of the twentieth century, the world system that had grown out of the crashes and contractions of the 1970s could be recognized as a globalized return of finance capitalism. Efforts to periodize twentieth century culture have, in turn, drawn productively on this account of the rise and fall of finance in order to locate recognizable trends in the cognitive, aesthetic and ideational practice along a shared chronology. Beginning with Marxist and materialist interventions into what were largely aesthetic theories of postmodernism in the 1980s and 1990s, the historical account of the expanded and accelerated form of finance capital as a defining feature of the political-economic story of the last decades of the century provided a means not merely of dating, but also of interpreting the distinctive aesthetic and ideological problems of late twentieth century culture.

Theoretical explorations of the relationship between finance capital and culture over the past twenty or so years have tended to stress three structuring linkages: (1) the enclosure or subsumption of culture within economic activity that occurs with the deindustrialization of advanced capitalist nations and the expanded role of culture as a

site for investment and speculation; (2) a new aesthetic problem of abstraction that enters into cultural production, suggesting a changed relationship to representation and 'the real', mirroring the growing abstraction of value that accompanies the precipitous growth of new the instruments of financial speculation (securities, derivatives, shorts, futures, swaps) that generate profit by multiplying the order of abstraction of classical industrial capitalism; (3) a new preoccupation with epistemological or cognitive distributions of space-time that register across numerous spheres of cultural production, responding in different ways to the new global movement of capital, on the one hand, and changed temporality engendered by the growing dominance of new technologies and instruments of financial speculation. Of these major themes or points of articulation, it is the third linkage of space-time that does most to link pensions and my own interest in population aging to these recent periodizations of late twentieth century society and culture.[56]

Fredric Jameson's account of the temporal dimension of what he variously names late capitalist, postmodern or globalized culture represents one of the more influential theoretical touchstones for theorizing the cultural effects of the growing dominance of finance capital at the end of the twentieth century. Among the most important concepts that recur in Jameson's analysis of culture and finance capital is the notion of a temporal

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[56] Though the abstraction of capital accumulation has a significant place in the body of Marxist and materialist accounts of postmodernism, theoretical writing that explicitly addresses the structural linkages between culture and the re-ascendance of finance capital in the last quarter of the twentieth century is, at present, surprisingly rare. Furthermore, apparent attempts to articulate these two aspects of the current conjuncture often fall short in addressing the linkage itself (see, for example, the 2010 special issue of *Cultural Studies* on "The Economic Crash and After" [24.3]). For a sample of recent examples, in addition to the two essays by Fredric Jameson cited in this chapter, of different approaches to forging this link, see: Martin, *The Financialization of Daily Life*; Ho, *Liquidated*; Benjamin, *Invested Interests*; Lash, "Capitalism and Metaphysics." Some noteworthy studies that attempt to draw this connection in cinema studies, in particular, include: Cazdyn, *The Flash of Capital*; Willemen, "Fantasy in Action"; and Cook, *Lost Illusions* (301-354).

"reduction to the present" that he describes at length in his 2005 essay "The End of Temporality." Here, Jameson explains,

> The dynamics of the stock market need to be disentangled from the older cyclical rhythms of capitalism generally: boom and bust, accumulation of inventory, liquidation, and so forth, a process with which everyone is familiar and that imprints a kind of generational rhythm on individual life. From [these older cyclical rhythms], then, is to be distinguished the newer process of the consumption of investment as such, the anxious daily consultation of the listings, deliberations with or without your broker, selling of, taking a gamble on something as yet untested... The narrowing and the urgency of the time frame need to be underscored here and the way in which a novel and more universal microtemporality accompanies and as it were condenses the rhythms of quarterly "profit taking" (and is itself intensified in periods of crisis and uncertainty). The futures of the stock market – whether in the literal and traditional sense of investments in crops and other seasonal goods not yet in existence or in the more figurative sense of derivatives and speculations on the company reports and the exchange listings – these "futures" come to be deeply entwined with the way we live our own individual and collective futures generally…Rather than a period of style, therefore, it seems more desirable to stage the "end of temporality" as a situation faced by postmodernity in general and to which its artists and subjects are obliged to respond in a variety of ways. This situation has been characterized as a dramatic and alarming shrinkage of existential time and the reduction to a present that hardly qualifies as such any longer, given the virtual effacement of that past and future that can alone define a present in the first place. (703- 708)

In his characteristically expansive observations here, Jameson's suggestion that we read the aesthetic dimension of the precipitous expansion of financial markets and the broader social effects of what Randy Martin has called "the financialization of everyday life" as productive of a "virtual effacement" of past and future is compelling and continues to resonate through other recent critical assessments of this latest return of finance capitalism.

 The linkage between the dominance of a new form of finance capital and a "narrowing" or "shrinking" of the temporal rhythms of modernity also offers an interesting route by which to return to the speculations on the social time of population

aging. Without detracting from the immense explanatory power of Jameson's thesis here, however, one does wonder, particularly in light of the extraordinary role of pension and grey capital in the formation and reproduction of what is named here simply as finance, whether this new mode of accumulation and its concomitant temporal "reduction to the present" should be, as Jameson recommends, so quickly "disentangled" from "older cyclical rhythms of capitalism," even as a strictly heuristic operation. Indeed, among the more remarkable implications of thinking the most recent return of finance capitalism in light of the aging of populations is the extent to which it begins to illuminate a new kind of "generational rhythm" imprinted on individual lives. What would it mean to think the experience of time adequate to today's finance capitalism, not in only in terms of a quickening of the comparatively sleepy, intensive rhythm of industrial capitalism, but rather in terms of a radically altered "generational rhythm" of capitalism being wrought by population aging? More challenging still, how might these two temporal logics be grasped synthetically, as concordant dimensions of an entirely different kind of time? Alongside the light speed of digitized financial markets and the capture of social futures enabled by new instruments of financial speculation, population aging hints at a radically new tempo being introduced to social relations by changes in life cycle. Without putting into question the accuracy of Jameson's diagnosis of a "reduction to the present," the temporal rhythm of an aging population with its implied time of neither growth, nor decline, adds new meaning to *late* capitalism.

This brief account of the relationship between pensions and finance capitalism returns me to the cultural and symbolic register of population aging with a more precise

framework for thinking about the mediation of something as complex and as ubiquitous as changes at the scale of a population, especially a *global* population. The high degree to which the financialization of capital is reliant, in particular, upon the capture and recirculation of pension savings, clarifies at least one, enormously consequential circuit through which the objective effects of population aging are linked to a determinate symbolic field, one upon which many of our deeply held notions of futurity and social reproduction – of retirement, of legacy and inheritance, and of the inter-generational continuity prerequisite of a concept of a polity as such[57] – are inscribed. Far from presenting an easy economic or demographic determination of transformations of the symbolic field, the work of deploying, managing and maintaining the siphoning of pension savings into increasingly volatile financial instruments has been possible, in part, because of a broader ideological project that is readily apparent in popular culture.

Advertisements which now air constantly on US and Euro-American television, as well as in rapidly developing market economies like India and Brazil[58] provide a blunt indicator of the ways in which the production of images of aging has become imbricated

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[57] The extent to which a concept of the polity is bound to the generational cycle of human society and the degree to which shifts and interruptions of this cycle threaten the continuity of a given order are a constant theme in political philosophy from Aristotle, to Rousseau to Derrida. A passage from David Hume's essay "On the Original Contract" outlines the philosophical problem (as well as its conservative tendency) famously:

> Did one generation of men go off the stage at once, and another succeed, as is the case with silkworms and butterflies, the new race, if they had sense enough to choose their government, which surely is never the case with men, might voluntarily, and by general consent, establish their own form of civil polity, without any regard to the laws or precedents which prevailed among their ancestors. But as human society is in perpetual flux, one man every hour going out of the world, another coming into it, it is necessary, in order to preserve stability in government, that the new brood should conform themselves to the established constitution, and nearly follow the path which their fathers, treading in the footsteps of theirs, had marked out to them. (Hume 284)

[58] ICIC Prudential campaign in India is perhaps the best example of how active advertisement for retirement investment services has become in these spaces.

in the systemic growth of finance. Here, the construction of ideologies of "productive" and "successful" aging are rendered in stark form. Ameriprise Financial's 2007-2008 campaign, for instance, features Denis Hopper, in sunglasses, on a tropical beach, reading the dictionary definition of retirement: "To withdraw, to go away, to disappear;" "time to redefine," he continues, "cuz I just don't see you playing shuffle-board when you're 64." In another, he declares that "dreams are what make you say, when I'm 64, I want to start my own business!" The soundtrack to these commercials – the Lovin' Spoonful's "Give Me Some Lovin'" – underlines the obvious targeting of baby boomers. It is, in fact, the case that when popular music is chosen for commercials for financial services, even when the target audience appears to be younger people (e.g. Barclay's 2007-2008 campaign, or the UK bank Halifax's much-aired "Something Good" advertisement), the selection is almost always circa-1960. Indeed, there is little that is not obvious about Ameriprise Financial's "Dreams Don't Retire" campaign; this, however, did not prevent the campaign from winning numerous industry awards, including the Advertising Research Foundation's Grand Olivy award in 2008. Some small crack is perhaps exposed, however, when these ads are viewed alongside the equally prominent, late 2000s "Talk to Chuck" campaign from Charles Schwab. Here the 'average joe' spokesperson actor complains: "I mean these financial services companies are still talking about retirement like it's some sort of dream. It's either some kind of magic number I'm supposed to reach, or it's beach homes, or it's starting a vineyard. C'mon! Just help me figure it out in a practical, let's-make-this-happen kind of way."

While Charles Schwab plays the realist to Ameriprise Financial's transparent appeal to baby boomer idealism, their notion of a "practical, let's-make-this-happen" approach to retirement savings seems as much an attempt to further naturalize a cynically exploitative nature of its service, as it is to lure in customers, particularly given the battered and bewildered mind-set of their target audience after the immense devaluation

Fig. 4.1   Charles Swchab television advertisement. "Retirement" (October, 2010)

of their investments in the crashes of 2007-2008 (Charles Schwab continued this campaign through 2008, featuring actors playing scared and disgruntled customers). It is difficult to imagine a clearer statement of the fiscal ideology of privatized, defined-contribution retirement investment than Charles Schwab's insistence that a "practical" approach to retirement begins by eschewing any concrete end or return on their savings – i.e. "some kind of magic number I'm supposed to reach". While the Ameriprise commercials project the future of overblown wish fulfillment, Charles Schwab's message

craftily reverses the terms: here, a concrete expectation for the future comes to appear the empty fantasy, while the sensible and "realistic" view consists in a radical reduction to the present (a fixed contribution) without end. And yet, both advertising campaigns also seem to present their own self-betraying 'tell'. In the case of Ameriprise, the catch phrase, "Dreams Don't Retire" introduces a kind of *double entendre* – i.e. "You[r Dreams] Won't Stop Working" – that happens to also offer as pithy a rejoinder to the message of the campaign as one could imagine. In the "Talk to Chuck" campaign, it is the peculiar aesthetic choice to render their talking heads using rotoscope animation – created with the same software used in Richard Linklater's dreamy, pop-metaphysical films, *Waking Life* (2001) and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) – that provides the bewildering sign giving lie to the 'down-to-earth' claim of the advertisements. However, particularly given the way the advertisement's message rests upon a rhetorical eschewal of saving for "retirement like it's some sort of dream," why Charles Schwab would want to trigger an association with the dream visions of Linklater's films is worth saying something about.

The mimetic indeterminacy of the rotoscoped image in the Charles Schwab ad initially seems to do little more than register the metaphysical inclination of financialization, a form of capitalism that rests on a faith in the enduring materiality and realizable value of (ever increasingly fictive) capital.[59] Yet, as I have tried to suggest, it is important to take account of the extent to which the heady abstraction of finance capitalism does not follow from an earlier moment of industrial capitalism only as a

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[59] Scott Lash has argued that, with hyper-abstraction of capital brought about by financialization of capital accumulation, "the entire operation of capitalism, including the economic infrastructure is becoming metaphysical. Indeed, [...] if in the national industrial age the principle of the physical was driver of the sphere of the metaphysical, that now the metaphysical principle infects the material base itself and is determinate in regard to the physical" (Lash, "Capitalism and Metaphysics" 2).

technological supersession, or even as a economic 'fix' to sustained profitability crisis, but also grows in tandem with transformations in the constitution of the population and the life course. This structural homology within the recent history of capitalism – between the growing power of finance capital and the increasing age of the population of subjects upon which it depends – is condensed in advertisers struggle to capture the desire called retirement. The homology of financialization and population aging come fleetingly into alignment with the formal and rhetorical manipulations of the signification of dream/real, where it is not only the growing dematerialized or metaphysical (Lash) circulation of capital that is being hidden and revealed, but also the disruption of any recognizable relationship between the life course and economic productivity under capitalism, in other words, of the generational cycle of work and rest which makes the notion of "retirement" meaningful at all.

The Cultural Study of Aging and its Contradiction

Beginning with the early emergence of the field of social gerontology in the 1970s, an interdisciplinary field of aging studies has slowly come into being, first through cross-disciplinary interventions within the social sciences and subsequently, in the wake of the cultural turn that swept the academy in the 1990s, through the renewed attention among literary theorists and social historians to problems of aging. An off-shoot of a broader theoretical and methodological turn in gerontology that is often identified with "critical gerontology," the expanded field of aging studies that comes into view in the 1990s is an attempt to resituate the study of age within a broader awareness of the life course as a

whole and the cultural, historical and ideological mediation of age as a category and social process. Crucial to this moment in the study of aging is a cross-pollination between gerontology and the theoretical conversations taking place in sociology, anthropology and across the humanities that has focused the attention of gerontologists on the role of discourse, representation and power in the production or construction of age as an identity, experience and object of expert knowledge (Bengston, Putney and Johnson 13-17). Thomas R. Cole puts the contribution concisely in his introduction to the *Handbook of the Humanities and Aging*; his handbook, he writes, must reflect practice "less scientific and instrumental, more historical, more concerned with the limits and conditions of its own knowledge and more focused on questions of representation, meaning and value than traditional handbooks in gerontology" (xii).

The extent to which forms of exploitation and social exclusion facing women align and are compounded with those facing the elderly has contributed to the strong connections between women's studies and age studies. Many of the germinal studies of aging and the elderly were produced by scholars, such as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, whose approach is explicitly articulated through the lens of feminist thought and struggle. The elevation of Simone de Beauvoir's meticulous exposure of a "conspiracy of silence" on the subject of old age in *La Vieillesse* (1970, translated in English as *The Coming of Age*), by cultural and humanistic aging studies in particular, as the definitive gesture of the "godmother of age studies" highlights the depth of this connection when it comes to the culture of aging. Within the wider field of social gerontology, the firm association of "humanistic" with "constructivist" approaches to aging that has solidified

in this field since the 1990s bears the mark of the political and intellectual inheritance of the theoretical framework of gender as a way of critically reflecting on age-based difference. In a manner closely analogous to the development from second to third wave feminist theory, critical age studies in the humanities have proposed not merely that "that we are aged more by culture than by chromosomes," but that chromosomes and a broader "bio-medicalization" of the institutions, ideology and study of old age are dangerously blind to their own historicity and discursivity (Gullette 101). As Kathleen Woodward writes, "just as studies in gender and sexuality examine the ways in which sex-gender systems operate in various cultures, so age studies is concerned with understanding how differences are produced by discursive formations, social practices, and material conditions" (Woodward, *Figuring Age* x-xi). While the production of rich archaeologies of old age and aging as a discursive field have added immeasurably to the comprehension and theoretical sophistication of the study of aging more generally, this focus on the discursive and subjective dimensions of aging, precisely through its effort to redress real methodological failings, appears at times to inadvertently produce a different kind of partial, reified object of study and critique. What constitutes the "material conditions" of age studies that Woodward indexes in the quotation above are often too quickly assumed as the static object that a cultural study of aging animates, complicates and "problematizes." It is telling, for instance, that in the 2005 edition of the Cambridge Handbook of Age and Aging, all entries dedicated to what might be considered cultural approaches to aging are grouped under the heading "The Ageing Self." Over the past decade, acknowledgement of the way in which "work in the constructivist and humanistic

traditions typically *substitutes* microsocial or narrative analysis for macroanalysis" has begun to emerge just as these new cultural and humanistic branches and constructivist tendencies in age studies have begun to realize a wider influence and credibility (Baars et. al 11).[60]

The field of literary studies, in particular, has played a decisive role in shaping the way that the subject of aging has been brought to concrete analysis of cultural texts. Allowing for the immense variation in approaches to aging that such literary theory and criticism have produced, surveys of the parameters of this emergent area of study highlight the predominance of a critical practice aimed at identifying and redressing the reproduction of stereotypes, ageisms and problematizing the assumed category of the "elderly." Referring to this field of research in literary studies as "literary gerontology," Anne M. Wyatt-Brown has noted the extent to which the study of old age in literature has developed as a critical response to research in gerontology (Wyatt-Brown, "Literary Gerontology Comes of Age"). While the contribution of literary criticism as well as important cultural histories of aging has provided a richly generative route to amplify the discursive construction of old age for the traditionally less theoretically reflexive, scientific and applied focus of gerontology, the disciplinary configuration produced in the intersection of gerontology and literary theory has also introduced limits. The research project that has emerged as the cultural dimension of age studies, to the extent that one can speak of dominant tendencies in such a young and diffuse field, seems defined by a critique of a disciplinary framework imputed as the unreflexive, scientistic and

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[60] See also Hagestad and Dannefer, "Concepts and Theories of Aging: Beyond Microfication in Social Science Approaches"; Vincent, "Globalization and Critical Theory".

quantitative bent of gerontology or, as one generally positive comment on the emergent field put it, "a static positivist monster" (Freter qtd in Katz 82). More often than not, the project of age studies in the humanities assumes the form of a kind of supplementary, reactive field of inquiry, conducting a critical investigation into the discursivity of old age produced elsewhere, while rarely concerning itself with the changing character of aging at the level of the systemic, which is to say demographic and economic conditions.

Norberto Bobbio's short collection, *Old Age and Other Essays* provides an interesting way into contemporary writing on aging and the potential limits of these trends in social and cultural theory of later life today. While Bobbio's essays on the subject of aging touch on a number of the pervasive themes of writing about old age, whether contemporary or classical – including, for example, the historicity and changed meaning of old age, conceptions of the wisdom and social disengagement of elderly people, the rhetoric of aging and obsolescence, and the politics of memory – it is his particular attention to the relationship between technological development and the social function of old age that I find particularly illuminating. Bobbio places special emphasis upon the rapidity of technological and "historical change" and the modern forms of social alienation these engender. "Let's face it," writes Bobbio,

> it is impossible to ignore the fact that old people are increasingly marginalized in an age marked by the faster and faster pace of historical change. In static traditional societies that evolve slowly, an old person encapsulates a community's cultural heritage more fully than any of its other members…In developed societies, the accelerating change in both custom and the arts has completely overturned the relationship between those who possess knowledge and those who don't. Increasingly the old are not in the know, while the youth is, mainly because of its greater ability to learn. (Bobbio 5)

On its own, there is something remarkably unremarkable about Bobbio's claim of the reversal of the "traditional" relationship between aging and knowledge. While there is a more specific claim, if largely implicit, in Bobbio's reflections about the social status of knowledge that I will return to below, when framed as it is, in terms of an unnuanced historical narrative of modernization, it assumes the appearance of a familiar, though historically inaccurate account of the modern devaluation of age.[61] When situated in the broader context of demographic aging, the notion of there being something 'out of joint' about the status of old age in "developed societies" is strikingly confirmed precisely by the persistence of the common-sense quality of these observations, in a sense *despite* the fact of population aging. In Italy, Bobbio's home and presumably the primary referent of the "developed society" that his remarks address, more than 18% of the nation's population was over the age of 65 at the time of his essay's publication (2001), with an old age dependency ratio (ratio of retired/"economically inactive" to young/"economically active" people) of 27.4, the highest in Europe and among the highest in the world.[62] To move closer to the crux of the matter, Italians over the age of 65 have a higher relative disposable income, relative to those 64 and under, than all but one other European country (Netherlands). While the latter statistic in particular needs to be considered in light of family and household structures of dependence, social security provisions and intergenerational transfer of wealth, when read in light of the low rate of

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[61] Pat Thane and others contemporary historians of old age have demonstrated the extent to which the veneration of elder members of societies has, to greater and lesser degrees, always been a mythology obscuring concrete marginalization, exclusion and inter-generational antipathy. Though many of these recent historical accounts of aging remain primarily occupied with the European case, the cultural history of trans-cultural variations on the figure of the elder-as-miser suggest the extent to which this applies elsewhere as well. See, Thane and Parkin, *The Long History of Old Age*.
[62] Eurostat. November 2010 Revision. Web.

employment of people under the age of 25, which like many European countries hovers around 20%,[63] older people in highly developed nations such as Italy occupy a measurably more significant numeric and economic presence in these societies than their youthful, technologically sophisticated counterparts. The extent to which these measures of the population translate into forms of cultural and political hegemony in Italy in particular is readily apparent; *The Economist*, for instance, has recently called Italy "a nation of gerontocrats," remarking on the fact that the leading candidates for prime minister in the 2006 general election were the same men (Silvio Berlusconi and Romano Prodi) that were competing for the post in 1996. Indeed, *The Economist* goes on to note that "between 1998 and 2004, the share of over-60s in Italy's "Who's Who" rose from 46% to 53%" ("Heaven for Gerontocrats" 29). What is to be made of the disjuncture between Bobbio's reflections on the marginalization faced in later life and the apparent prominence and even dominance of this age class in the society he is addressing?

None of these statistics can be said to contradict Bobbio's experiential account of marginalization during later life in Italy, or the common sense notion that the pace of technological and historical change tends to overturn the traditional distribution of knowledge and expertise. Indeed, insofar as diagnoses of the predominance of knowledge economies in advanced industrial nations registers the changed, increasingly commodified status of knowledge in these same aging societies, one cannot but admit Bobbio's account as a piece of a larger social transformation that is taking place. On the

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[63] According to the European Commission's (Eurostat), as of November 2010, youth (< 25 years) unemployment has remained between 15% and 20%, for the past decade, reaching a high of 19.6 within the Euro Area in 2009. It is worth noting that unemployment for persons between 26-74 years is half that of young people, standing at 8.2 in 2009. In the case of Italy, this disparity is even more stark, with unemployment rates standing at 25.3 for people under 25 and 6.4 for people aged 25 to 74 in 2009.

other hand, it is also impossible to ignore the paradoxical quality of the fact that the "increasingly marginalized" aging population of Italian society that Bobbio addresses constitutes a numeric majority and a key, perhaps even dominant political, cultural and economic fraction of the society from which they are also, he argues, being sidelined. The notion of the marginalization of the elderly that we find in Bobbio bears close kinship with the dominant critical approach toward the problematic of old age spearheaded by literary and cultural studies, which supports an essentially oppositional insistence – one directed, implicitly or explicitly at methodological assumptions of social scientific gerontological research – on the truth claim of the marginal subject position of the elderly *per se*. To underline the contradiction of the affective truth of the subject of old age and the demographic or quantifiable political-economic truth of population aging does not necessarily imply a methodological alternative between the two. Indeed, I want to suggest that cultural analysis, in particular, is in a distinctive position to be able to approach the problem of population aging in a way that begins from the fact of a contradiction between the subjective or particular truth of an individual aging and the material and systemic situation of population aging; in short, of at least attempting to think something like what a Hegelian would call the concrete universal of the problem.

To put this another way, it is useful to consider the way in which this problem of representing aging runs analogously and, indeed, overlaps at every turn with the old representational problematic of class. Micheal Apted's *Up Series* offers a convenient and illustrative example. The *Up Series* is a recurring television documentary which follows the development of a group of fourteen British children over the course of their lives.

Airing for the first time as *7 Up* in 1964 when its subjects were seven years old, the upcoming instalment, *56 Up* is expected to air on BBC One in 2012. From the first instalments of the series, when the interviewees are still children, it is clear that the underlying object of the documentary is the British class system. The real brilliance of Apted's longitudinal study of class, however, becomes apparent only in the later episodes of the series, as the interviewees become increasingly aware of the way that they are also characters in a film, whose answers to the same questions every seven years have a life of their own and, however hard the interviewees seek to personalize or claim the uniqueness of their experience, their answers circulate as representations of broader social and historical categories, types and classes.

Setting aside the voyeuristic pleasure of seeing the interviewees' successes and failures, the appeal and unique pleasure of Apted's interviews lies above all in their capacity to so consistently undermine the participant's (and our own) pretensions to the singularity of their experience and its relative autonomy from the determinations of class, race, gender and age. The three representatives of the English upper-class that the series follows – John, Charles and Andrew – are most consistent in their recognition of, and vocal resistance to the way the series shapes their lives into being representative of their social position. In perhaps the most famous sequence in the series, the first interview with these three preparatory school boys finds them parroting their parents' private views, claiming to read the *Observer* or the *Financial Times* and defending the virtue of private (UK's "public") education – "I think it's not a bad idea to pay for schools. Because if we didn't, schools would be so nasty and crowded." – and even outlining their future

trajectories (with great accuracy) through exclusive secondary schools and Oxbridge colleges. In subsequent episodes the boys become increasingly critical of the extent to which their lives and views are rendered representative of their class position. "The point of the program," a 14 year old Andrew ventures in the second instalment of the series, "is to reach a comparison; and I don't think it [does]. Because we're not necessary [sic] typical examples." John, who is being interviewed at the same time, continues, saying, "And I think that's what people seeing the program might think. Falsely." The sociologist in some of us is tempted to simply embrace this interpretation of Apted's series as the success of the project and marvel at the perfect presentation of these individuals, as it were, 'found out' as so sheer effects of their class constitution. The success of Apted's series, however, is not simply its capacity to expose the consistent conformation of its subjects' to their class position; rather, the achievement of the *Up Series* is its construction of a representation of class which is able to capture *both* the ineluctable determination of class over the course of a life time and, at the same time, the singularity of each of its subjects' life worlds.

Like the gap separating Noberto Bobbio's account of the experience of aging from the socio-economic distribution of age and power which silently frames his experience, one is confronted in the *Up Series* by a gap between the singularity of life stories of the characters and the film's inescapable unfolding of the repetition in each idiosyncrasy of their lives. Slavoj Žižek's Hegelian interpretation of the thought figure of the parallax – after Kojin Karatani's intervention *Transcritique* – in his recent *The*

Parallax View offers a concise way of grasping, all at once, the paradoxical *a priori*

condition for social critique with which Apted's *Up Series* confronts us:

> The standard definition of the parallax is: the apparent displacement of an object
> (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in the
> observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to
> be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply "subjective," due
> to the fact that the same object which exists "out there" is seen from two different
> stances, or points of view. It is rather that, as Hegel would have put it, subject and
> object are inherently "mediated," so that an "epistemological" shift in the
> subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself
> (Žižek, *Parallax View* 17).

The parallax view becomes, in Žižek's hands, a way of figuring the conundrum of

materialist critique; that insurmountable gap that follows so closely after the Kantian

break between immanent/phenomenal reflection of the transcendental/nominal Thing is,

in Žižek's Hegelian or materialist parallax transposed to the gap *within* the immanent

itself. To return to the example at hand, the parallax describes the situation repeatedly

staged in the *Up Series*. Confronted with the representation of their own seriality, the

participants are forced into an impossible – and, not surprisingly, uncomfortable –

position of both *being* subject and object of the film's projection of their situation within

a system of class. The personal frustration that ensues and the participants' efforts to

reassert the singularity of their experience is neither the embarrassing 'bourgeois'

pretension that Apted might like us to see, nor is it reducible to evidence of the coercive

manipulation and falsification of Apted's program. Rather, precisely by exemplifying the

insufficiency in either of these interpretations, the *Up Series* puts into motion the

irreconcilable parallax view of class. In this sense, the characteristic gesture of materialist

ideology critique is not the simple assertion of an objective or determining reality, but, as

Žižek puts it, "the reflexive twist by means of which I myself am included in the picture constituted by me—it is this reflexive short circuit, this necessary redoubling of myself as standing both outside and inside my picture, that bears witness to my "material existence" (ibid.).

The figure of the parallax unfolds the problem of the ideology of age studies and the contradictions of Norbito Bobbio's account of the social alienation of a numerically and politically dominant class in a very efficient way. To force an account of the exclusion and immiseration experienced by the elderly into confrontation with the systemic situation conditioned by the ever increasing demographic and economic significance of the aging population in the world's richest countries exposes a deep hermeneutic rift. The notion that the task of critical inquiry into the cultural life of aging must dedicate itself to redressing the blindness of an economistic or statistical logic of the demographic to the personal or affective experience of aging impedes our capacity to understand the fullness of the problem no less than it must challenge an unreflective reliance on the positivistic certainties of demographic or economic projections of the mass effect of aging populations. Precisely in its capacity to grasp the epistemological gap reproduced by both these reductions of the problem, a materialist account of the situation of aging today that begins with the challenge of a parallax view of the problem offers a reconstitution of the object of a cultural theory of aging that only strengthens the need to return to the cultural mediations of demographic change that energize, structure and make meaningful the latter.

The Cinematic Subject of Aging

Before testing these ideas in a more concrete application, I want to reflect quickly on the way such a parallax view of the culture of aging societies responds to the broader, epochal claim of population aging that, as I've argued, poses specific questions about the cultural time of finance and the lateness of capitalism. The irreconcilable, epistemological gap between the collective (or class) and the subjective view of aging expands here to touch upon the longer historical frame in which population aging names a process that frays the meaning of progress, of growth, of futurity. It responds, in other words, to the confounding coincidence of growth and decline that population aging forces one to conceive as a single, social process. At the systemic level, as I have suggested, the challenge of population aging presents itself negatively in theoretical accounts of the social and cultural consequences of the financialization of the world system, accounts which tend to occlude the generational time captured in the pension schemes and savings upon which the abstraction, intensification and spatio-temporal "shrinkage of existential time" of financialization depend. Finance capitalism's dependence on the monetary and affective investment in pension savings today can thus be seen to interrupt an interpretation of its logic in terms of a sheer acceleration and dematerialization and conjures *within* these effects of financialization the apparently incommensurable rhythms of social life: of (baby) boom and bust, work and retirement, of generational cycles.

When abstracted from its relationship to a historically specific system of social relations, population aging, as both a mass demographic phenomenon and as a means of figuring the trajectory of a social totality, does indeed appear a radical break with the

linear, expanded reproduction of capitalism in every sense. Yet, when grasped in terms of its structural relation to transformations of a post-industrial mode of production, to the cultural logic of a globalized and financialized world system and to the persistent, if reconfigured effects of class, the eventful break of population aging appears thoroughly consistent and incorporated. It is perhaps here, between these two incommensurable ways of recognizing the relationship of aging to what I have called, after Ernest Mandel, the lateness of capitalism, that the figure of the parallax is most compelling and useful. The most pressing critical challenge of the emergence of a phenomenon as extensive and as unprecedented as the aging of the world's population is that of finding a means of apprehending the dialectical simultaneity of its break and continuity with the axiomatics of infinite growth, newness and reproduction.

.   The recent films of Japanese filmmaker Naomi Kawase offer an example from the field of cultural production that regrounds my discussion in the representational problem that I finally want to address. In short, I want to ask, if there remains something unsynthesizable, or parallaxical about the function and figure of population aging today, how does this structural contradiction manifest at the level of the aesthetic? Emerging from the demographically oldest society on the planet, Kawase is among the youngest directors to win the Cannes festival's Grand Prix. Trivial on its own, the fact of her youthful rise in the global cinema industry puts into relief the notable dominance of elderly characters in her films. Many of Kawase's films, including some of her earliest work (*Ni tsutsumarete* [1992], *Katatsumori* 1994, *Tarachime* [2006]) are constructed out of early super-8 video footage that Kawase took of her grandmother. Of her most recent

films, *Mogari no Mori* (*The Mourning Forest*) focuses in a similar way on the life of elderly characters, straying in provocative ways away from the more documentary mode of her earlier treatment of elderly people and elderly communities (*The Weald* [1997]) and into narrative fiction. Viewed in light of her recent work, Kawase's early, playful home videos appear as more than simply amateurish juvenilia (Kawase was in her early 20s when she shot these films); rather, the grainy, point of view images of her earliest experiments are reworked and alloyed in her more recent films with formal borrowings from Japanese and European art cinema in ways which soften and naturalize the effect of the handheld camera, while at the same time allowing the camera to strategically draw attention to itself. *Mogari no Mori* centers on the relationship between a young woman (Machiko, played by Machiko Ono), who has begun work at a retirement home after having recently lost a child in a car accident, and an elderly male resident of the retirement home (Shigeki, played by Shigeki Uda), who mourns his long-dead wife while slipping into dementia. When a planned hiking trip is interrupted by car trouble, the elderly Shigeki runs into the woods by the road, looking for his dead wife and forcing Machiko to follow after him.

Fig. 4.2 Mogari no Mori, Machiko and Shikegi outside the retirement home.

At this moment in the film, a clear break is constructed between the setting of the retirement home, the setting for the first half of the film, and the space of the forest. This break in the film establishes a layering of recognizable spatial distinctions between public/private, or institution/'nature' onto a more figural (though perhaps no less familiar) movement from the space of reason to that of the unconscious, from the space of the present to the space of memory, from the material world to the world of spirits. This layered figurative movement at the level of the narrative discourse is, in turn, mirrored in a formal shift in the film that draws on the gradually changing lighting conditions achieved as the day ends and the characters make their way further into the forest as well as an ever shrinking focal distance and increasingly reliance on an unsteady image that takes place over the second half of the film. This shift is crystallized in a sequence of shots immediately after Machiko's car breaks down and before the two

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characters have entered the forest, as Machiko wanders, calling for Shikegi, who has escaped the car and is making his way toward the forest (Fig. 4.3). A shaky following shot down a gravel road overtakes Machiko as she pauses before a field of watermelons.

Fig. 4.3 Machiko and Shikegi enter the forest in *Mogari no Mori*

Here, the shot opens, for the last time in the film, to capture the entire space of the watermelon patch, where Machiko runs out after Shikegi, who is busy stealing a watermelon. Following the chase that ensues and that leads the characters into the forest, Kawase dispenses entirely with the deep focus shots of rural landscapes – so evocative of Tarkovsky's study of memory, *The Mirror* (*Zerkalo* 1975) – plunging after the two characters with a camera that, growing increasingly unsteady with the uneven landscape and drawing ever closer to the actors, mimics the perspective of a silent, invisible witness. In the latter half. Kawase's camera becomes a haunting presence suggested by a point of view which is neither the unmarked and omniscient view of the "ideal observer," nor that of a character. The point of view becomes gradually more embodied as Kawase's handheld camera registers each step over the increasingly uneven terrain as her camera follows Machiko and Shikegi off the road and into forest. At the same time, the shrinking focal distance as the characters move further off the road draws the camera so close to the characters faces that the image begins to transform into a subjective shot, where the silent witness seems to briefly possess the characters' point of view (Fig. 4.4).

The formal strategy distilled in Kawase's camera work puts the representational problem of aging into relief at the level of a film aesthetic. In a way that brings *Mogari no Mori* into alignment with the representational problem of the parallax, Kawase's stylistic choices can be read in terms of a longer history of film form, extending logically from prior efforts to create what Pier Pasolini theorized as a cinematic "free indirect subjective." In his famous essay "The Cinema of Poetry," Pasolini theorizes the development of poetics of art cinema in terms of various attempts, reaching a height, for

Pasolini, in neo-realist and new wave film, to produce a cinema which invents something approximating the literary effect of free indirect discourse at the level of the cinematic shot or "look." When describing literary fiction, free indirect discourse refers to the capacity of narrative fiction to adopt a mode of narrating a story that is both, and neither that of a purely objective, omniscient relation to the story, nor that of a entirely subjective or internal point of view. Roughly corresponding to a combination of a third and first person narrative discourse, free indirect discourse produces a deep blurring between the level of story and discourse, dispensing with the artifice of repeating or reporting characters' speech, signalled for example by the use of quotation marks (e.g. John said he was going to the store, instead of "I'm going to the store," John said), while at the same time shifting between the different limits and idiosyncrasies of different characters' voices and points of view in a way that positions it outside of the story. Pasolini's attempt to imagine a free indirect discourse in cinema begins with his identification of "direct" cinema with the subjective shot; here, he proposes the subjective (point-of-view) shot is analogous to direct narrative discourse in literature (Pasolini 551). The subjective shot, in this sense, becomes the visual enunciation of the "she sees" of a direct (literary) narrative discourse, establishing with each iteration the objectivity of the directing consciousness of the camera.

The dissonance built into Pasolini's analogy between specifically textual characteristics of narrative discourse (i.e. quotation mark) and the elements of the construction of film form results in the concept of a distinctly cinematic "free indirect subjectivity" (551). Replacing the term "discourse" with "subjectivity" underlines the

extent to which Pasolini's transposition of the concept of free indirect discourse to film

aesthetics bears with it an epistemological problem of narration and the tension between

the subjectivity and objectivity that, by virtue of the intrinsically stronger mimetic effect

of the visual, the "discourse" of film narration necessarily puts into relief. Free indirect

subjectivity thus names the moment when, as Gilles Deleuze puts it,

> The camera does not simply give us the vision of the character and of his world; it
> imposes another vision in which the first is transformed and reflected…We are no
> longer faced with subjective *or* objective images; we are caught in a correlation
> between a perception-image and a camera-consciousness which transforms it (the
> question of knowing whether the image was objective or subjective is no longer
> raised). (Deleuze, *Cinema I* 76)

It is along these lines that we might understand Kawase's strategic use of handheld digital

cinematography. The sequence of shots from *Mogari no Mori* described above presents

an exemplary case of the ways in which the cinematic free indirect discourse that has

continued to develop since Pasolini's essay. In the intentioned movement between static,

deep focus shots and the shallow, shaky close-ups and following-shots, Kawase's film

claims a cinematic space in which "correlation of perception-image and camera-

consciousness" is constantly in play; in this sense, while Pasolini can point to exemplary

instances of "obsessive framing", "montage-rhythms" and "stylemes" to describe the

prevalence of "free indirect subjectivity" in the films of Michelangelo Antonioni or Jean-

Luc Godard, *Mogari no Mori* offers a case in which the intertwining of the objectivity

and subjectivity of the film image is constantly at work, as a kind of formal baseline upon

which the film unfolds.

Fig. 4.4 Free indirect subjectivity in *Mogari no Mori*

I want to return here to the "reflexive twist" of the parallax described by Žižek as a way of extrapolating the relevance of the formal construction of a "free indirect subjectivity" in Kawase's film for the representational problem of aging. Situated in relation to the narrative movement from the space of the retirement home to the forest, the formal transition at the level of the shot and the gradual deconstruction of the

distinction between objective and subjective view in the latter half of Kawase's film assumes the appearance of a condensation of a doubled representation of aging that attempts to contain within its frame both the subjective experience of aging and a depersonalized, institutional vision of a social and demographic process that is more urgently felt in Japan that in any other society in the world today. As with the subjects of Apted's *Up Series*, Kawase's film can be read in terms of its attempts to capture the irreconcilability of two epistemic fields. While this irreconcilability appears as a discursive torsion, as the series' subjects are forced to speak and appear as at once subject of and subject to their class position, in *Mogari no Mori* it is the image itself that becomes symptomatic of an attempt to conjoin the split figure of the aging subject.

Clint Eastwood's 2008 film, *Gran Torino* provides a final formulation of these formal problems that returns matters more clearly to the broader frame of the political economy of population aging with which I began this chapter. *Gran Torino* tells the story of Walt Kawalski, an aging, ailing, Polish-American Vietnam veteran, played by Eastwood, who, following the death of his wife, is left alone with the multiplying signs of his own approaching death in a neighbourhood in Highland Park, Michigan that has become home to a predominantly Hmong community, for whom Walt feels nothing but bewildered resentment and racist animosity. Walt's isolation, his alienation from his children, becomes the thing that eventually forces him into grudging contact with the "slanteyes," "swamp rats" and "gooks" next door. As Walt is quickly swept into conflict with a gang threatening his neighbours, he comes to assume the role of community patriarch and, finally, of sacrificial saviour to the Hmong community. What is

immediately remarkable about *Grand Torino* is the way it attempts to narrate the aging of its protagonist in terms of a broader, demographic transformation of the suburb in which the story is set. Read against the transparent attempts of so many Hollywood treatments of *Vollendungsroman* genre – *On Golden Pond* (Mark Rydell, 1981), *The Straight Story* (David Lynch, 1999) or *The Bucket List* (Rob Reiner, 2007) – *Grand Torino* is clearly interested in locating aging as a problem embedded within a definite socio-historical context and a part of social relations that move beyond the confines of the bourgeois family drama. What is equally striking, however, is that for all its evident intension to do so, the film fails to produce a substantial means of articulating the familiarly private experience of aging to the contradictory social context in which Walt's story becomes absorbed.

Two central narrative threads in *Gran Torino* are of importance here: Walt's aging and illness, on the one hand, and his growing involvement and investment in his neighbourhood's struggle against the local gang, on the other. At first glance, these two elements of the plot develop in tandem; Walt's isolation and growing awareness of the nearness of his own death explains and motivates his otherwise unlikely involvement in the lives of neighbours who, at the beginning of the film, he sees as sub-human invaders. Superficially, then, this is a story of social harmonization, in which the aging white character finds meaning and redemption in selfless service to a racialized community, a community in which he discovers the decency and 'American values' that he finds so lacking in his own children and grandchildren. This narrative arc is focused through the story of Walt's assumption of a father role to Thao, a Hmong boy (played by Bee Vang)

who is threatened by a local gang. Variations of this narrative arc are repeated elsewhere in recent Hollywood productions; for instance, the correspondence of Jack Nicholson's character in *About Schmitt* with Ndugu, his Tanzanian "foster child" that becomes a kind of therapeutic outlet for the former's post-retirement ennui and, in particular, his disappointment with his daughter. What is remarkable, for me, about the consistent repetition of this narrative is less its iteration of a weak liberal parable of cross-cultural fraternity than it is the way that the aging subject is defined within it.

In the relationship between the two dominant narrative threads in *Gran Torino* one can, thus, identify the outlines of a representational logic that centers on a depiction of aging. This logic, I want to suggest, can be imagined as a kind of controlled, ideological shell game through which the contemporary social conditions positioned at the heart of the narrative – namely, suburban immigration and aging – appear, disappear and appear again in a manner that blurs their location and relation to one another. In the first half of the film, the representation of aging is limited to a form of private, religio-existential struggle, punctuated by the persistent visits of the local pastor and Walt's fits of coughing. Walt's growing affiliation with his Hmong neighbours and his finally fatal struggle against the neighbourhood gang subsumes the private sphere within which the fact of his aging remains nevertheless sequestered, a fact underlined formally by the film's use of lighting to maintain a visual distinction between the often almost total darkness of Walt's home and the brightly lit exterior. Walt's aging and illness motivate his entrance into the dominant social drama of the second half of the film and even provide a certain generic conventionality to his actantial position as tragic sacrifice in the

Fig. 4.5 (Top) Walt (Clint Eastwood) looks into the mirror, alone with his illness. (Bottom) Walt is introduced to his neighbours by Sue (Ahney Her).

resolution of this drama; yet, whether as narrative lever or as actantial signifier, aging itself appears without social referent or effect. The events of the second half of the film – Walt's assumption of a patriarchal role within his neighbourhood, his confrontation with the neighbourhood gang and his eventual sacrificial death to ensure the safety of his neighbours – can all certainly be read as a repetition of a liberal mythology that conceals the reinscription of a racist construction of white nativism beneath a veneer of multicultural communion; but they also do so through a process of ideological

displacement and sublimation that effectively disables any capacity to see Walt's aging itself as a social process, a process that has its own effects beyond itself and may even be implicated in the condition of Walt's neighbourhood and the macropolitical processes of forced migration, poverty and racism they imply. In this sense, though in a very different form and context, *Gran Torino* provides an ideologically sophisticated restatement of the partiality identified in Noberto Bobbio's reflections on aging. Where Bobbio's vision is limited by its naturalization of old age and its blindness to a wider historical and socio-demographic process of aging, in *Gran Torino* aging is transformed into private motivation for a social drama from which the process of aging itself is effectively occluded.

Indeed, this reading is only thickened and acquires a deeper relevance for the wider constellation of problems which gravitate around population aging when one attends to the setting of the film and the economic history inscribed therein. It is certainly not inconsequential that the setting of the film, Highland Park, was also the site for the first assembly line factory, a laboratory for the mode of production and the site of a primitive accumulation that would launch a century of US hegemony. Upon this backdrop, *Gran Torino*'s narration of the inter-ethnic and inter-generational conflict and, even more powerfully, its location of a story of an aging character at the centre of this conflict appear alongside an epochal narrative of the aging of a mode of production. As with the great industrial districts of the 19th century, the story is as much one of a demographic flux as it is of the introduction of the assembly line and its reorganization of industrial production. Following the initial success of the assembly line at the Ford Motor Factory

Fig 4.6 Exits and entrances: Mirrored shots of (Top) Elderly mourners leaving a funeral at the Kawalski home in Gran Torino and (Bottom) the Hmong community arriving next door to celebrate the birth of a child.

in 1913, Highland Park experienced the fastest growth of any municipal population in the United States and very likely in the world. Between 1910 and 1920, the population of Highland Park expanded by approximately 1081 per cent, from a village of 4120 people to a small city of 46,500. This demographic influx, so reminiscent of Manchester before it and Shenzhen after, certainly followed the pattern of capitalist primitive accumulation outlined famously by Marx, but with a marked difference, exemplified in Henry Ford's implementation of the 5 dollar day. A technological breakthrough in the mechanics and

management of production, the first test of the assembly line on April 1, 1913 was equalled in significance by the transformed function of the wage that the massive increase in productivity of labour necessitated. Under what is now known as Fordism, Marx's industrial reserve army assumed a significance beyond that of a pool of labour power; the industrial reserve army of working people that flooded into Highland Park in the second decade of the twentieth century was a population of consumers.[64]

Gran Torino's return to Highland Park, almost a century after the arrival of the assembly line and long after the closing of the Ford Factory around which a new kind of labouring and consuming population of workers first came into being, puts into stark relief the transformation capital accumulation that separates these two moments. Just as the Model-T stands today as the emblematic object that captures the origin of a consumer capitalism, in Eastwood's film, the titular Gran Torino, a car produced for the US market between 1968 and 1972, becomes the symbolic container for the dissolution of this regime of accumulation. Walt's Gran Torino becomes a fetish that cathects both a nostalgia for a long past moment of American industrial supremacy and an epistemological (and racial) anxiety about a social future that resists articulation. At the level of narrative discourse, Walt's classic car becomes integrated as the object mediating Walt's relationship to his Hmong neighbours and Thao. Walt's decision, at the end of the film, to will his car to Thao and leave nothing to his own children's families, presents a somewhat expected, though also suspicious closure to this primary arc of the narrative. Read allegorically, Thao's inheritance of the Gran Torino assumes the appearance of a

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[64] On the specific importance of the Highland Park Ford factory for historical emergence of a Fordist mode of production, see Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 125-141; Flick, *The Automobile Age*, 40-55.

broader socio-economic drama, in which a wholesome American spirit of industry is redeemed as the legacy of one working-class immigrant generation to the next. Providing the expected tragic resolution following Walt's sacrificial death, the figurative projection of the cross-cultural regeneration of American prosperity – crystallized in the film's closing shot of Thao, with Walt's dog Daisy by his side, cruising along the coast of Lake St. Clair in his Gran Torino – forms a final, somewhat prosaic narrative resolution of this (racio-) socio-economic fantasy.

What I mean to put into focus through this reading of *Gran Torino* is how the formal effect of a doubled view in the depiction of aging that I briefly identified in Kawase's *Mogari no Mori* reappears in Eastwood's film in a way that, at the level of narrative discourse, aligns the epochal claims of aging as a global demographic process with the more specific representational problem raised in the depiction of aging in narrative cinema. The split view of aging in *Gran Torino* depicts both a private experience of the aging and ailing subject as well as evidence of the way this subjective experience extends beyond itself to the level of social relations, to the transformation of a regime of production and reproduction. The fissure traversing this cinematic *vollendungsroman* lies where these two aspects of the story momentarily touch (see, for instance, Fig. 4.6). Rather than identifying this gap as somehow a failure of the film itself, I am more interested in imagining it along the lines of Žižek's parallax view, as a way of giving form to a deeper cognitive break or mismatch that stubbornly refuses the synthesis of a problem. The economic history of a post-industrial United States that quietly frames the representation of aging in *Gran Torino*, as well as the wider

ideological constellation of finance, pensions and "productive aging" in which this film must be historically situated, highlights the manner in which these aesthetic and cognitive gaps are in turn always subtended by a politics. It is toward an apprehension of a wider field of politics shaping and being shaped by the representation of old age that an attentiveness to the demographic dimension of aging pushes current cultural theories of aging.

Conclusion

This dissertation was written, in part, as an experiment in method. Read in this way, the critical operation that I have staged in the three preceding chapters tends to introduce a kind of inversion of the expected structure of a dissertation. While a formal discussion of methodology is typically located at the outset of a dissertation, in the preceding study, by virtue of the relatively untried nature of my guiding problem of a hypothetical cine-demography, the problem of method forms the substance of the chapters themselves. It is a structure, in the sense of a deliberate arrangement of related concepts and problems (its *problematique*, if you like) that, from the outset, functions to make sense of a sequence of concretely distinct moments, theoretical approaches and archives of film. While the three cases I examine are each situated in very different contexts and approach the possibility of an aesthetic dimension of demography from different directions, together they form a deliberate and coherent tri-partite emplotment of a problem. Underwritten by the periodizing account raised in the roughly chronological ordering of these three chapters, the development of the question of method also proceeds autonomously, responding to the terms given by the conceptual structure established at the opening of this dissertation. To draw conclusion from this dissertation, then, I want to begin with a methodological review of its three central sections, with an eye to the way that they give shape to the hypothetical idea of a cine-demography sufficient to the historical conjuncture of late capitalism.

The development of this problem in the preceding three chapters can be reviewed in terms of a shared or articulating narrative structure. In sum, this dissertation develops

around two overlapping and intersecting conceptual dramas. In the first place, there is the aesthetic or hermeneutic problem of the integration of a demographic dimension into conventional understandings of a materialist political aesthetics. A second, parallel and sometimes intersecting drama centers upon the recurring conceptual problem of a contradiction between structural efforts to resuscitate the capitalist world system over the last quarter of the twentieth century and the – economic, political, ideological, cultural – effects of uneven and failing population growth. Each chapter stages a confrontation of these two primary dramas through a separate methodological lens and in a different geo-historical context.

In the case of chapter one, my methodology can be broadly conceived as a cultural symptomology, aimed at drawing out an emergent demographic imaginary as it is expressed in speculative cinematic projections of future disaster during the 1970s. Within the heightened ideological and epistemological disorder of this historical moment, population emerges in a way that is distinct from its previous ideological formations; it is global in a distinctly new way, but it is also marked by the unevenness of demographic and economic development introduced by this large geo-political scale and a cognitive incapacity to contain this unevenness within available crisis discourses of population. A film like *The Omega Man* is thus acutely expressive of the way in which an uncertainty about *where* the threat of population can be cognitively fixed in space becomes the overriding source of alarm and anxious fantasy. Underwriting this spatial anxiety is a deeper uncertainty about the referent of the "problem of population" itself. As the clamour of alarmist discourses of overpopulation reached their height, the end of the brief

mid-century "baby boom" in the West was settling back into its longer trend toward demographic aging and declining fertility rates. In this sense, what I call the referential excess in the figuration of science-fiction populations and the attempt, in *The Omega Man* in particular, to produce a coherent figure of both urban abandonment and overcrowding, become themselves symptomatic of emergent contradictions prompted by the first moments of the systemic restructuring of economic and geo-political relations called globalization or late capitalism.

In the second chapter, I adopt a methodological approach more clearly in line with the conceptual parameters of twentieth century (Marxist) political aesthetics. Here, the aesthetic or hermeneutic dimension of a cine-demography eclipses the periodizing problem that is foregrounded in chapter one. Returning to the well-worn problematic of cinematic realism, this second chapter works through what it would mean to integrate a demographic dimension into the material conditions that realism is often interpreted as attempting to reflect or represent. Within this framework, I allow the demographic features described by a discourse of a looming depopulation of Eastern Europe in the 1990s a certain provisional truth, bracketing temporarily the complex ideological investments that also shape them (particularly in the transition from a socialist utopia to a capitalist one!). As the latent fear of depopulation that marks the American science fictions of the 1970s reappears as the stark reality for former socialist states in 1990s, the spatial anxieties of the former are superseded by the temporal preoccupations of cinematic slowness, exemplified in Béla Tarr's *Satantango* and *Werckmeister Harmonies*. Between the temporality implied in these discourses of demographic decline

and the combined effect of a slowing of cinematic time in Tarr's films, I draw an analogical connection along which to theorize a materialist aesthetics that might account not merely for the formal resonance of a given mode of production, but for the way in which form responds to a given mode or regime of reproduction. My speculation about the shape of a biopolitical aesthetics thus emerges out of an interrogation of the changing conditions for and form of a cinematic realism.

While the relation between social and cinematic time becomes the conceptual touchstone in my discussion of Tarr, the shift between two radically separate geographical and geopolitical contexts that occurs in the movement between my first two chapters maintains an implicit sense of the global scale to which this project addresses itself. The nominally national situations and cinemas that organize these first two chapters are consistently undermined by the systemic view of the evolution of capitalist relations of production, a view that, particularly from the 1970s on, exceeds the (always-already imaginary) limits of the nation-state. This tension between the national and global is most explicit in the first and third chapters, becoming overshadowed, in the second chapter, by the more focused formal concerns that dominate my consideration of Tarr's film style. While these systemic and periodizing problems recede into the background in chapter two, the macroscopic view of the cultural and economic processes of globalization and the periodizing problems it raises returns emphatically in the last of my three studies.

At a methodological level, this final chapter begins a synthesis of the respectively spatial and temporal preoccupations of the two preceding chapters. Here, the two

dominant conceptual registers (or dramas of the dissertation) are themselves subjected to a logic of splitting. The figure of the double and the parallax view dominates throughout this section, becoming a way of imagining a cultural theory of population aging as part of the broader story of post-industrial capital accumulation, financialization and the cultural imagination of futurity specific to these political-economic transformations. The national frame of the first two chapters is replaced by a more flexible idea of global cinema and of a globalization of population discourse. The imagination of world population that I first addressed in relation to the spatial anxiety of the seventies' representation of demographic apocalypse reappears here not as an emergent apprehension, or a science fictional projection of the future, but as a dominant, unmarked and almost ambient feature of the present. Following the consideration of an expanded cinematic realism in Tarr, my theorization of the cinematic and popular cultural expressions of population aging in this last chapter attempts to fuse the complex figure of social time raised by an aging population and the spatial anxiety about the worlding of population. To tie this broader historical frame to the running problem of a demographically inflected political aesthetic, I propose a parallax view of population aging as a way of locating the sensible expression of structural contradictions raised by this demographic condition. A sense of the double-view that becomes explicit in my discussion of Kawase and Eastwood's films can, in fact, be seen in play throughout this dissertation, structured into the basic confrontation between two representational systems – namely, demography and film – and the attempt to align the work these two systems each perform. Under the sign of financialization – the latest response of capital to its long failure to increase its

profitability after the crises of the 1970s – a materialist aesthetics focused on the splitting of the sensible also aligns with the growing distance between the classical, industrial organization of capital and labour and the contemporary condition in post-industrial economies. The aging of a population, connoting an uncertain time between decline and growth, also becomes a channel along which to follow the way in which the space-time of finance attempts to reshape what remains profitable in industrial labour (e.g. pension funds) into the basis for continued exploitation. What is compelling about the parallax for the visual culture of a post-industrial society becomes particularly clear through the problem of aging populations, foregrounding the growing divide between two historical regimes of accumulation, industrial and its ostensible "post." As capital reaches toward ever more "immaterial" and "metaphysical" spaces for its reproduction, the material body of labour and its figuration as a population remain and continue to exert themselves.

On its own, the conclusions to be drawn at this level of method – the relative success or failure of the conceptual or methodological experiment in a critical practice of cine-demography – must finally be left to the reader. These problems do, however, assume a more clear solution that seems to demand some more definite concluding reflection when it comes to the historiographical or periodizing story that is wound through these three studies. In its present form, this dissertation raises the possibility of thinking the periodicity of the culture of late capitalism or globalization in terms of its demographic undercurrents and specifically the motif of decline seems to characterize the historical period of the capitalist world system that begins with the crises of the 1970s. Given the progressively greater prominence of this motif of decline in each of my three

chapters, it is tempting to extrapolate from the demographic history a larger, tragic, almost Splenglerian historical narrative of civilizational decline. This is not my intent. There are a number of reasons why such a historical teleology of demographic-cum-social decline proves a false simplification and one that I have, indeed, actively attempted to undercut.

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to guard against a presentation of changing demographic conditions – the most decisive one being declining total fertility rates – as existing outside of a broader system of social relations that is itself historical and subject to change. Part of what this entails is a rejection of any ethical or normative interpretation of demographic behaviour. Indeed, to take the case of primary narrative of declining fertility rates, there is every reason to view a future of a diminishing population of human beings on the planet – a condition, it should be repeated, that is almost nowhere in evidence today – as a necessary good from a progressive social and environmental stand point. Yet even this perspective risks tripping into the trap of a mystifying hypostatization of demographic measurements, treating them as something other than a partial figuration of a broader historical, cultural and political-economic conjuncture. Equally suspect is the historiographical practice of isolating and, in a sense, ontologizing the demographic elements of a historical period as a way of encompassing the totality of an epoch; such a history requires not only an uncritical acceptance of the positivist premise of a modern demographic rationality, but also a naïve ascription of an internal continuity, homogeneity or false universality to a period. It is precisely the imperfect, uneven and conflicted relationship between symbolic, political and economic expressions

of a historical moment that define its periodicity. More interesting for me has been the work of located specific historical discourses of population and population crisis alongside, on the one hand, periodizing accounts of the capitalist world system after the crises of the early 1970s and, on the other, of the cultural and specifically cinematic production that emerges in concert with these population crises. What is introduced by positioning the statistical, demographic account of crisis in this layered, differential historical frame is, in the first place, an expanded sense of the mediation of demographic discourse. Interpreted through changing ideas and images of, for example, ecological catastrophe, (post-)industrial labour, or the symbolic projection of personal and political futures, the contours of something like a demographic imaginary comes haltingly into view. A second thing that is enabled by reading moments of so-called population crisis through their economic and visual cultural contexts is a critical sensibility of the discontinuities and contradictions that a moralizing, historicist or vulgar economistic account of population behaviour can and do often work to obscure.

The contradiction that arises most consistently in my three studies is that between, on the one hand, the persistence of a social and cultural articulation of futurity or progress as growth and, on the other, the parallel projections of futures defined by demographic disaster, decline and aging. It is the visual and cinematic formalization of these demographic crisis discourses that, in this study, provides the means to put into relief their contradictory relation to an overlaying ideology of growth and the economic imperative of continuous, expanded accumulation of capital. This contradictory relation is first articulated in my dissertation through the presentment of the cinematic crowd and

its absence focused through the science fictions of population disaster in chapter one. In *The Omega Man*, the example I analyze at length, the rhythmic alternation between images of the swarming crowd and the deserted street becomes the monstrous and anticipatory demographic figuration of precisely this contradiction between growth and decline. In this first case, what is being reckoned with is the unevenness of population behaviour – amidst and between the three worlds – that comes crashing into consciousness with the urgent awareness of, and identification with a *global* population during the systemic crises of the late 1960s and 1970s. Film (and popular film in particular) formalizes the uneasy conjoining of these spatial and demographic anxieties in the ubiquity of the narrative and visual preoccupation with the construction and breakdown of spatial delimitations of populations that, as I argue, is particularly apparent in science fiction films of this period – for instance, the barrier or bubble separating the elect from the barbarian populations in *Logan's Run* or *Zardoz*. As I move to situations of population decline and population aging, the structural contradiction between growth and (population) decline becomes more explicit, focused through the set of geopolitical and economic realities that characterize the capitalist world system after the 1970s as well as the aesthetic problem these contradictions manifest in film form and narrative content.

The question of a cultural theory of population aging that occupies me in the final chapter presents the fullest statement of the way in which this contradiction manifests in visual and film culture in a way that dovetails with other periodizing accounts of globalized or late capitalism. The lateness of capitalism is here given a doubled meaning that conjoins the condition of aging populations and the long system failure or

"downturn" in the capacity of capital to find or generate new channels for profitable growth, signalled here by the moribund trend toward financialization. Robert Brenner's historical diagnosis the systemic "long downturn" of profitability after the long post-war boom is thus coupled to the long decline of total fertility rates that is now the object of a discourse of population crisis among aging nations. My interest here is less in making an argument that is better left for economic historians – though it is remarkable that this broader sense of capitalism's lateness has not, as yet, been given serious consideration by critical historians of capitalism. Rather, my proposition is limited to a basic presentation of a different way of approaching the cultural and aesthetic features that are associated with this period of capitalism's lateness, its globality and its financialization. The analytic device of the parallax that I turn to in my final chapter provides a means of reading formal and narrative tendencies apparent in the global cinematic preoccupation with stories of aging and later life. The profusion of split views and the management of incommensurable optics of aging, in this sense, might also be read as identifying a broader epistemological gap at work in a system that is no longer able to sustain its prime imperative to grow ceaselessly. The irreconcilable split between socio-demographic and private space of aging and between a subjective and structural temporality of aging in these films is compounded with the split within a new, post-industrial economic logic of aging that, for instance, seeks to leverage pensions from their relation to productive labour and, instead, transform them into instruments of financial speculation and increasingly abstract accumulation of fictitious capital. The underlying argument traceable through these three chapters, then, is that in any periodizing account of the

culture of late capitalism, the features typically identified with the system of social relations emerging since the crises of the late 1960s and 1970s – for instance, the globalization of capital flows, or the dematerialization and quickening accumulation of digitized currency and debt speculation – must be thought through and against the persistence of the modern, industrial cycle of daily, reproductive and generational time.

Yet, in proposing such a global argument about the cultural significance of demographic trends, this dissertation presents some noteworthy omissions in its selection of sites and objects of analysis. A full consideration of the migration of populations remains to be properly integrated to this study, as does a direct engagement with the insidious role of demographic knowledge in shaping the politics of fertility in the former "Third" and contemporary "developing" world. The most conspicuous absence, however, or the elephant in the room of this dissertation is China.

This dissertation begins and ends with the repetition of a minor and relatively undeveloped motif that offers a convenient starting point for some quick reflection on how a consideration of the cine-demography of the contemporary East Asian situation might lead this study. Bookending this dissertation are two strikingly parallel scenes, each drawn from American films, in which an emphatically white American protagonist is represented as the sacrificial redeemer of a new world: in chapter one, it is the death of Robert Neville, the character played by Charlton Heston, whose blood contains the antidote that will guarantee the future of the multi-ethnic congregation of children who surround his body at the close of *Omega Man*; in chapter three, it the sacrifice of another all-American actor, Clint Eastwood, whose bullet riddled body in *Gran Torino* brings

about the arrest of the neighbourhood gang and promises a future for his Hmong neighbours, who again are pictured standing over his body near the conclusion of the film. There is a way in which the peculiar repetition of this raciological fantasy image registers a latent recognition of a disjuncture within the Western demographic imaginary.

Fig 5.1 Walt Kowalski (Clint Eastwood) as "white saviour" in *Gran Torino*

To put this in terms of the broader periodicity of the demographic and economic framework of the world system, this disjuncture might be read as indexing the fact that while the advanced economies of the American century are aging and their economies failing, contemporary China is experiencing a demographic and a cinematic revolution that is in important ways at odds with some of the assumptions and periodizing claims put forth in this dissertation. China (and perhaps one could include East Asia more generally) provides perhaps the most complex and certainly the most compelling case of the conjuncture of demographic discourse and cinematic production today. While a full account of this will require more space than is available here, it is worth noting, however

briefly, the way in which case of China since 1970 also substantially complicates the broader frameworks that emerge from a focus on the dominant spaces of capital at the end of the twentieth century.

The demographic history of China over the period that interests me is an immensely complex story that, while in some ways following the story of fertility decline that characterizes the West, functions through a distinct configuration of state and bio-political control and aligns with a very different economic situation. Population control was a primary objective long before the so-called "one-child policy" and, even after this moment, has undergone numerous realignments and reformulations. In their recent wide-ranging study, *Governing China's Population*, Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin Winckler provide a rare example of a theoretically sophisticated account of the appearance of Western modes of statistical and reproductive governance with "Chinese characteristics" since the Deng era. In conversation with Foucault's account of biopolitical governmentalities and of neoliberalism, Greenhalgh and Winckler's book indicates the extent to which the preponderance of demographic rationality in the PRC is generating new social and governmental formations as well as critical re-evaluations of the political and cultural uses to which population is put. In broad quantitative terms, the trend in total fertility rate in China demonstrates a rapidly accelerated version of the declining birth rates in the West. During the 1970s, the number of children per woman dropped from just under 6 to just under 3. Over the course of the 1980s, this number fell to just above replacement level of about 2.1 and, according to the best current data, by the 2000s, the fertility rate has fallen further to about 1.6 (cf. Greenhalgh and Winckler 17-18).

Concurrent with this extraordinary transformation in the reproductive behaviour of the world's largest national population is the emergence of China as one of the largest industrial producers of the world's manufactured goods and, particularly since 2008, a voracious consumer of Western debt. Alongside the immense effects of the various "hard" (i.e. limits on family size) and "soft" (i.e. programs aimed at producing "quality" populations) strategies for governing demographic fertility over the past forty years has been a process of mass migration and displacement from rural to urban-industrial zones that recalls (and dwarfs) the process of urbanization that accompanied the industrial revolution in England and Western Europe in the late 19th and 20th centuries. The production of "instant cities" around the special economic zones such as the famous case of Shenzhen have introduced a rapid redistribution of populations on a scale of hundreds of millions and ushered in new categories and systems of subjects and citizens – new bureaucratic designations as well as new, often competing modes of self-identification. In a way reminiscent of other world historical periods of "primitive accumulation," the scale of migration of populations in response to the demands of foreign capital investment and government policy have been accompanied by an array of bureaucratic and police apparatuses targeting the regulation of mobility, the policing of reproduction and, most familiarly, women's bodies.[65]

The extent to which these demographic transformations have played into the emergence of distinctively new forms of civil society and political subjectivization offers

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[65] For a small sample of the current work on population policy in the context of China's "socialist market economy", see: Greenhalgh, "Planned Births"; Anagnost, "A Surfeit of Bodies"; Murphy, "Turning Peasants"; Liang, Zai and Zhongdong Ma. "China's Floating Population."

a clear route into the level of cultural and cinematic production in contemporary China. To gesture to one example, I would point to the gravitation of many of the most successful works that have grown out of the independent documentary movement to the subject of the "floating population" and the self-identified members of the "floating generation." Films like Wu Wenguang's *Bumming in Beijing: The Last Dreamers* (*Liulang Beijing: Zuihou de mengxiangzhe*, 1990), or Jia Zhangke's *Platform (Zhàntái, 2000), Dong* (2006) and *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*, 2006) and many others[66] have firmly located the experience of migrant subjects and populations, particularly among young people, as a central theme in this emergent cinema. In another vein, one might also note the spike of big-budget, epic martial dramas from China (and Hong Kong), such as the *wuxia* remakes from directors Ang Lee, Yimou Zhang and John Woo. Alongside the transparently nationalist interest of these films there is also an interesting counter-point to the depopulation of the film screen that Serge Daney diagnoses in his short speculation about a cine-demography with which this dissertation begins – indeed, given the box-office success in Asia of films like *Red Cliff* (*Chì Bì*, 2008-2009), this example, just as much as the case of large-cast Bollywood films, confirms the asymptotic relationship of screen and theatre populations, just as it diverges from Daney's projection of the demise of classical epic cinema.

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[66] For instance, Zhou Hao and Li Lianghong's *Houjie* (2002), Wang Bing's *Tie xi qu* (2003): two films documenting the decline of local industries and the lives of its migrant workers at the end of the Jiang era; Huang Weikai's *Piao* ("Floating", 2005), Wang Yiqun's *Buanding de shenghuo* ("An Unstable Life," 2003): examples, like Jia Zhengke's *Platform* and his more recent *The World* (*Shijie*, 2004), of DV documents of traveling entertainers, performing troupes and peddlers; Zhang Zhituo's *Xinjiang Xinjiang* (2008) and Ai Xiaoming's *Kaiwang jiaxiang de lieche* ("The Train to My Hometown", 2008): two recent documentaries focusing on the cyclical movement of seasonal labour (on the scale of millions) through a particular local industry.

When one adds to this brief sketch the fact that China's population is on course to become one of the fastest aging populations in the world over next thirty years, the complex contribution that a consideration of the case of the PRC would make to this study begins to come into view. If a story of the decline of industrial production forms the historical back-drop against which the statistical narrative of demographic decline can be re-articulated as cultural and cinematic historiography, the fact that this decline is occurring concurrently with unprecedentedly rapid growth of conventional industrial production in China would seem to throw into question any implication of a too-tight homology of demographic, economic and cultural processes that my dissertation draws.

Noting the future demographic projections of the PRC that promise a rapid aging of the largest national population on the planet is to once more emphasize the futural, projective quality of so much of my thinking in this dissertation. The distance between measurements of a mass of people as population and the projection of these measurements into its possible future is the conceptual space in which demography is at once most terrifying (in the fears and anticipatory closure it can enable) and politically interesting (in the unstable, contradictory imaginaries to which its futures give shape to). A different kind of projection stands at the heart of what the political aesthetics of cinema – putting aside the collaborative praxis of producing a film, it is in some sense always the figurative and literal distance from film (or digital file) to screen in which one can pose the problem of the politics of cinema. During the last quarter of the twentieth century both these representational systems and their respective claims to a politics can be seen to confront and express the challenge of a new regime of accumulation and a new relation

of capital and labour. A different sort of urgency about the concrete challenges of feeding and sheltering (increasingly older) populations has emerged at the outset of this new millennium in tandem with clear signs of a new paradigm for visuality and visual media. It is toward establishing a basis for situating and understanding the novelty of this current or emergent conjuncture that this dissertation seeks to direct critical attention toward.

At the time of writing this, popular protests are sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa, bringing with a concentration of images of revolutionary mass mobilization that, in recent decades, had begun to seem a thing of the past or distant future. These events are the expression of a long history of exploitation and anti-democratic regimes as well as a more immediate response to the continued rise of food prices globally. Yet the images broadcast of the multitude of unemployed young people crowding the streets of Tunis, Cairo and Benghazi also testify to the degree to which these causal processes are conjoined with a regional demographic situation. These images are, moreover, made meaningful among their global viewership through mediated memories not only democratic revolt and revolution, but of "population bombs" and "youth bulges." Also at the time of this writing (May 2011), across the world, the earthquake, Tsunami and subsequent disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan prompts similar reflection, though this time about the future of the oldest nation on the planet. Coincident with the images of streets flooded with angry (and hungry) youth, the world is presented with images of gymnasiums full of elderly residents from cities along the Eastern coastal of Japan, cities whose reconstruction is uncertain, given the unlikelihood of the numbers to populate them in the coming century.

If the image of population has consistently been the image of crisis, its proliferation today should not be surprising. Yet, while the demographic crises examined in this dissertation witness the gradual waning of the recognizable image of population as industrial labour, it is unclear what, if anything can take the place of the industrial army as a future political signifier of population.

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