

Robert L. Cagle writes about film and popular culture. His current project, a study of melodramatic elements in contemporary South Korean film and television texts, was awarded the first ever Grant for Overseas Research on South Korean film by the Korean Film Council. He is teaching at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

“Crying, Laughing, Loving, Lying: The Melodramatic Mode in Popular South Korean Film and Television Dramas”

The melodrama (a form of *sinpa*) has long been a staple of South Korean motion picture production. From the very earliest days of film production, melodramas have enraptured Korean audiences with their portrayals of long-suffering heroes and heroines who are subjected to oppression or worse at the hands of invading armies, colonial officers, heartless schoolmates, or even evil parents. Although some critics have made the claim that the melodrama no longer holds the same privileged place in Korean Cinema that it once did, for example, during the so-called Golden Age of Film in the 1950s and 1960s, a close analysis of commercial feature films released over the past ten years illustrates that nothing could be further from the truth: In brief analyses of works of various genre types (comedies, action films, horror films, and romantic dramas) this essay will illustrate that the melodrama continues to function in South Korean cinema as a dominant mode of representation that, like its American counterpart, perpetuates prevailing mythologies about the nation, its history, and its people. Furthermore this essay will outline, as the above authors do with the American model, the standard features of the South Korean melodramatic mode using some of the most important commercial feature films to be produced in South Korea over the past decade.

Steve Choe is currently a PhD. candidate in the department of Film Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He has published essays on German and Korean cinemas and is writing a dissertation entitled *Life and Death in the Cinema of Weimar Germany: 1919-1924*.

“Affectual Silences: Toward the Outside in the Films of Kim Ki-duk”

This paper begins by discussing the recurrence of silent characters throughout the films of Kim Ki-duk. Hee-jin, who works as a clerk in a fishing resort in *The Isle* (2000); Han-ki, the violent pimp in *Bad Guy* (2001); and a young girl and old man, married to each other by the end of *The Bow* (2005): such non-speaking figures recall the acting of cinema’s silent period, whereby emotions and affect are conveyed through facial expression alone. For characters who do not or cannot talk, it is the face that emerges as the expressive surface that “speaks”, externalizing internal emotions and articulating affect. The paper follows readings from Gilles Deleuze on Béla Balázs in *Cinema 1* (1983), where the former explains how the face in cinema takes the image beyond space and time, toward what he calls “any-space-whatever”. It is this beyond, which cannot be represented but only thought, that becomes the “grounding” for a potential ethics. This is not an ethics that is codified beforehand, functioning as a set of rules to regulate good and bad behavior; instead, it is the possibility for making an ethical choice in itself that somehow forecloses the tyranny of the moral law. By way of example, Deleuze refers to Kierkegaard’s reading of Abraham’s sacrifice in *Fear and Trembling*.

The paper then attempts to clarify and move beyond these writers through a close reading of a few key scenes from *3-Iron* (2004). It shows how the main protagonists of the film, Sun-hwa and Tae-suk, act in ways that do not simply conform to correct moral behavior: indeed, it is the very violence of the paternal law (her husband batters her repeatedly) they resist throughout the film. As such, they *choose* to go outside the moral status quo and thus create their own ethical standards, standards which are not predetermined, non-teleological, and by definition operate outside the law. In effect, affect is the means through which Sun-hwa and Tae-suk become outsiders to the patriarchal moral code. In *3-Iron*, this ethics is exemplified in their hospitality, of the arrival of the other within one’s own space, and Tae-guk’s arrival to uninhabited homes (where he cleans and organizes).

The paper finally proposes that Kim’s films are about the production of difference and otherness more generally. Their intense violence, representations of hyper-masculine men, and depictions of overly obsessive, damaged Koreans reveals a body of work that resists the narrative demands of a liberal, global cinema. These films critique the discursive constraints of a normative morality and their concomitant demand for a “happy end” to a film. In this the question of ethics is posed: how can we face others such that we simultaneously respect their radical otherness? The faces of these silent characters which populate Kim’s films speak their difference from the narcissistic identity of the self, uncannily making the familiar unfamiliar. They attempt to perceive the silent chaos that underpins moral certainty, and point to the possibility of an outside to the present state of things.

Susie Jie Young Kim is working on a manuscript on turn of the century Korean print media as well as various projects on Korean cinema. She has been teaching at Duke University.

"Extreme to the Limit: Verging on the Noir City"

This paper entitled, "Extreme to the Limit: Verging on the Noir City" will focus on Kim Chiun (Jee-woon)'s self-proclaimed "noir-action" film, <*Talkomhan insaeng*> (*A Bittersweet Life*, 2005). It explores the antipodes of extremity that is articulated through the cinematic city. Kim Chiun proffers a new urban experience that is demarcated by liminal spaces constituting the poetics of a luxe façade and topography of noir concealing a violent underworld. Negotiating this labyrinth, however, invariably involves an unraveling of identity.

Hyangjin Lee is professor at the University of Sheffield, and the author of *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics* (Manchester UP, 2000).

“Memory in Winter Sonata”

‘My Memory’ is the title song of *Winter Sonata*, the quintessential *hallyu* drama series. As suggested by the title song, memory is the chief motif in the twisting plots of this ill-fated love story. It rationalizes the emotional excess and moral dilemma of the storyline, the two most important elements of any melodrama. The hero’s childhood memories not only show purity and the eternity of love, but also serve as a testimony of his morality. His moral dilemma – a choice between love and filial piety – is a recurring thematic concern in Korean melodrama. It is memory that qualifies *Winter Sonata* as a timeless Korean family drama.

Memory is, in fact, the motif throughout Yun Sukho’s Four Seasons Series, which consists of *Autumn Tale*, *Summer Scent* and *Spring Waltz*. Furthermore, some of the most well known *hallyu* dramas, such as *Stairway to Heaven*, *All In* or *Full House* also use childhood memories and the death of a family member as key elements in the storyline. Interestingly, the *hallyu* drama boom seems to prove that the typically Korean elements transcend national boundaries. The romance and tragedy of *Winter Sonata*, in particular, has led many middle-aged Japanese women in Japan to change their loyalty from Japanese to Korean melodramas. They watch Korean melodrama for the emotional devastation and subsequent catharsis it brings. In their eyes, Junsang/Minyoung, the hero of *Winter Sonata*, personifies the fusion of nostalgic sentimentalism and trendiness. The social implications and political impact of *Winter Sonata* as a *hallyu* drama appear to evince the transnational sensibility and cultural intimacy between Asian viewers. This paper will critically examine the transnational reception of *hallyu* melodrama, focusing on the role of memory in *Winter Sonata*.

Jecheol Park is a PhD student in the Critical Studies in the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California. Currently he is working on Contemporary East Asian Cinema, Trauma Studies, and Critical Theory.

“Revengeful Fathers: the Vicissitudes of Affect in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Samaria*”

One of the salient features of South Korean cinema since the early 2000s would be its tendency to stress the extreme sensation and affect that exceed the dimension of narration. Many of the films seem to depict traumatic scenes like those of loss and revenge particularly at the level of bodily sensation. Several questions might be posed concerning this kind of films: to what socio-symbolic crisis do these films respond? Can one distinguish between different modes of affect and what are the (im)possible relations between them? How do these relations unfold in those films and what are its implications with regard to the formation of the subjectivity? In this research paper, I will attempt to address these and other questions particularly through two films, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (Chan-wook Park, 2002) and *Samaria* (Ki-duk Kim, 2004).

The question of unrepresentable affect is one of the most difficult questions that have haunted most of the philosophers, and Immanuel Kant and Jacques Lacan, among others, managed to resolve it by introducing the concepts of the sublime and of the Real respectively. And Freud’s and Lacan’s elaborations of the different species of affect will also be helpful to the resolutions of the questions above. Particularly important is the way in which other particular kinds of affect conceal one’s encounter with the affect of anxiety as the only non-deceiving affect. And it is the logic of the sublime and one version of the Real that this concealment occurs. As many other similar films, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Samaria* mainly invoke the same logic of the sublime to generate the extreme affect over the signification in different ways respectively. In this respect, these two films would be the examples of the great aesthetic achievements, yet they remain to be problematic and conservative in terms of ethico-politics.

There is, nevertheless, another way in which we spectators encounter the excess of affect. Unlike the affect of the sublime, this does not correspond to any transcendent Beyond that we as finite beings can never reach, but opens the gap of the impossible into the immanent world of beings. It is through this gap, the other version of the Lacanian Real that we encounter the anxiety as such and can have a hope for a new subject who is ethically responsible and politically subversive. While *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Samaria* seem to rely on the sublime affect in their explicit level, I would argue that there remain a few allegorical moments in which the sublime shines through the ordinary, not transcendent, subjects. Perhaps, today, one of the most difficult but most urgent tasks for a new horizon of subjectivity in the sphere of spectatorship and criticism is the one of discerning and positivizing these silent but virtually intensive lacunas.

Seung-hwan Shin is a PhD student in the department of English & Film at the University of Pittsburgh. He is interested in Modernism, Marxism, postcolonialism, and currently working on the evolution of the cinematic image-space in the Pacific Rim cities through noirs, Wu-xia films, blockbuster films, and on its relation to the emergence of the gothic-allegorical subaltern collectives between the West and East.

“Lady Vengeance’s Surreal Trial: From Failure of Remembering to Remembering of Failure”

Given that among the notable films that led the recent eruption of Korean cinema are thrillers, horrors, and gangster films, one of the questions we need to answer might be: why is Korean cinema obsessed with such themes as failure, anger, or violence at the moment of its stunning success? The collapse of the military regime in the 1990s probably played an important role in its eye-popping development in that, for instance, it allowed filmmakers to address previously forbidden issues, appealing to Korean audiences. This line of approach, however, leaves us wondering why then Korean cinema often appears so obsessively to involve excessive emotions such as despair, rage, or vengeance. Does this imply that the fall of the military regime in fact did not liberate the Korean people—and cinema, either—from the nightmarish past? If the old despotic regime is no more, what makes Korean people and cinema anger-ridden and vengeful? Moreover, why has cinema—not theater or literature, for instance—become a prism to make such inconspicuous, but general discontents visible? Driven by those questions, I will examine Park Chan-wook’s last vengeance film, *Lady Vengeance* (or *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*) in the hope of deciphering how the emergence of vengeful cinema echoes the current historical conjuncture of post-liberation South Korea and inspires sympathy for violence in people’s minds.

To be more specific, I will focus on the revenge sequence in which Keum-ja invites us to an abandoned school in the middle of nowhere as her court to reveal the forgotten past. What makes the film unique here is above all the “surrealistic nature” of her court. For instance, almost black-and-white, the sequence strongly implies that the court is not a realistic one; nor is it the realm of dreaming. Unmappable, the space appears essential because it is there that the buried justice returns with the unquenchable demand of its realization, if not in the form of a real judge, then as a ghost as Jacques Derrida points out in an essay on law: “The undecidable remains caught, lodged, at least as a ghost—but an essential ghost—in every decision, in every event of decision.” Simply put, Keum-ja’s surrealistic court and the ghostly characteristics of the avengers in the court, it seems to me, spring from Korean cinema’s efforts to make unnoticed justice legible through images, which is why I want to examine the nature of the surrealistic court in association with how to situate the emergence of “vengeful” cinema in the post-liberation era.

Keum-ja’s trial, however, is not just a personal wish fulfillment, an imaginary solution to social issues: the delay of her revenge rather appears a necessary detour to gain “sympathy,” a process of echoing/organizing the fragmented subaltern forces embodied through diverse inmates she met in prison and the parents who lost their children, which makes her revenge distinct from other stereotypical revenge stories. Then, the sympathy Keum-ja pursues can be read as exemplifying how Korean cinema resonates with people’s inconspicuous, but common discontents. In that sense, I will also attempt to decipher the implications of the “sympathy” for vengeance, that is, the way Korean cinema provokes/articulates the general discontents that are deeply embedded in people through the motif of vengeance, whereby the failure to remember turns into the collective remembering of failure in Korean cinema’s vengeful images.

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A Brief Look at Short Korean Film

What do we learn about a national film industry by looking at its production of short films? Focusing on post-1980s South Korea, this lecture considers the ways in which short film has been produced: as graduate film, as industry calling card, as oppositional practice, as part of omnibus film projects, as e-film. It develops the argument that in contemporary South Korea, the lines separating 'feature film' from 'short film' are being blurred in new and distinctive ways, thus challenging current critical approaches to Korean cinema's diverse attractions.