Delirious Cities and Their Cinema: On Koolhaas and Film Studies

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The Structures of Globalization

During our current age of globalization the idea of the city is undergoing a profound transformation, with the introduction of multiple and imbricated categories to define increasingly complex urban forms and experiences. Within this emerging geopolitical system, the "world," "global," or "mega-" city occupies the apex of an implicit hierarchy of size and preeminence, and a map of intricately interlaced urban centers, a polycentric network of cities, coexists with the map of nations.[1] According to the more extreme urbanisms currently under consideration and construction, "in the geography of advanced forms of capitalism, *metropolis* equals *world*."[2]

Because of the intensifying competition among these cities and their smaller counterparts for the attention of capital, residents, and tourists alike, the star architect has become one of the key contributors to the reinvention of urban environments.[3] Over the past decade architects have assumed the mantle once worn

1. Saskia Sassen is probably the most influential theorist of this new world order, particularly the version of this urban network presented in *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001). In the East Asian context a number of sociologists and urban theorists have written about the "world city craze" sweeping the region, reflecting an aspiration to centrality among businesspeople and politicians who locate themselves at the margins of the world system and suggesting that the multicentered urban network also maintains an implicit hierarchy. For an account of this aspiration to world city status in China, see Yi-Xing Zhou, "The Prospect of International Cities in China," in *The New Chinese City: Globalization and Market Reform*, ed. John R. Logan (London: Blackwell, 2002), 59–73. See also Zhou Muzhi, *Ding: Tuoqi Zhongguo de da chengshi qun* (*Megalopolis in China*) (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2004).

2. Alejandro Zaera Polo, "Notes for a Topographic Survey," *El Croquis* 53 (March 1992): 32.

3. For a general introduction to the star architect phenomenon and a case study of Sir Norman Foster, see Donald McNeill, "In Search of the Global Architect: The Case of Norman Foster (and Partners)," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 293 (September 2005): 501–15.

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by major figures in the film world.[4] Private executives and public officials hope to associate their own institutions with the aura of the Frank Gehry or Sir Norman Foster brand, a risky but often rewarding proposition. World-class architecture generates its own publicity, and city leaders clamor to join the exclusive ranks of urban centers graced by a major project overseen by Santiago Calatrava or Steven Holl or Rem Koolhaas. The often vituperative responses from citizens and critics are balanced by the buzz that accompanies the construction of a monument to cosmopolitanism. The international image of a city was once defined in large part by cinema, by the accumulation of memorable scenes and iconic shots filmed on location or in a pristine studio simulacrum and then distributed to theaters around the world. Architecture has usurped much of that power in this new era. Iconic structures by eminent architects feature in advertising campaigns and guidebooks seeking to encapsulate the city in an image. If cinema once supplied the most widely disseminated public face of a city of lights and movement, it has largely surrendered that role to the even more public facades of the latest architectural marvel ready to be photographed by any passerby and posted instantaneously on the Web for the world to see. The era of Yasujiro Ozu's Tokyo or Federico Fellini's Rome slowly recedes and yields to the moment of Gehry's Bilbao or the new Beijing currently under construction and designed by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron or by Koolhaas.

Although the current global economic collapse has halted or curtailed many large-scale real estate ventures, the sponsors of the most recent wave of spectacular architecture, especially the economic and cultural capitals of emerging markets in Asia, are poised to emerge from the crisis before their counterparts in Europe and North America, to cultivate the next boom or bubble, and to continue their building frenzy of the past two decades. In the increasingly baroque gradations of urban form, architecture has become and will likely remain the most conspicuous emblem of cultural and economic distinction.

At the same time that architects have risen to the stratosphere of international stardom, the relationship among cinema, architecture, and the city has become one of the most prominent topics in film and media studies, and a renewed fascination with the city film has surfaced on the international festival circuit, espe-

4. Anecdotal evidence ripped from the headlines of recent Chinese tabloids suggests that major international architects have attained a superstar status once reserved for practitioners of more popular art forms. The romance between Ole Scheeren — the Koolhaas protégé and partner overseeing the construction of the China Central Television (CCTV) tower in Beijing — and actress Maggie Cheung has been a frequent topic in gossip columns and more mainstream press. See, e.g., Chen Nan, "Ich bin ein Beijinger," *China Daily*, April 1, 2008.

cially in the work of directors from East Asia. More than at any point since its heyday in the 1920s or at the beginning of the French New Wave, the city film has become a crucial genre for contemporary artists working with and through the reality of massive urbanization. At a moment of transition for moving images, as celluloid passes into obsolescence and digital media evolve from their "revolutionary" stage to a position of dominance and quotidian normality, cinema has entered a period of renewed vitality that belies its unfamiliar and uncomfortable status as an old medium.

Contemporary urban space now fascinates and energizes filmmakers, even as cinema occupies fewer of the incessantly proliferating screens in hands and on desktops, when flash media and Internet video have supplanted old-fashioned celluloid as a platform for image consumption, and text messaging and Web surfing refashion still images and everyday communication as dynamic exercises (a constant cycle of click and transmit, send and receive) facilitated by cutting-edge technology. As film fades to black and screen cultures become almost exclusively digital, this quintessential modern medium remains an indispensable conceptual tool for understanding an era of hypermodernization, especially as experienced in the emerging megacities of East Asia. Just as Lev Manovich and others have noted the importance of a cinematic metaphor and template for so many successors to film, including most digital media as currently conceived, so too for architecture and urban theory that otherwise advertise their affinity for emerging new media rather than the revolutionary art forms of the long-gone twentieth century.[5]

As architects and patrons attempt to publicize the avant-garde qualities of their atelier or city, one of the most effective strategies is a conspicuous embrace of digital technology and the creative economy centered on image production and circulation. Architecture and images retain the intimate relationship established in the age of cinematic cities, but the utopian visions of a networked society, the infinite flexibility of digital media, and immediate access to information have replaced the cluster of ideals inherited from the century of cinema. As they harness the excitement associated with new media and construct its structural equivalents, architects and theorists also trace a genealogy that allows us to see new media — and the still vaguely defined phenomenon that develops alongside it, the twenty-first-century city — through the lens of cinema. The intricately knotted relationship between cinema and new media also helps us understand the stakes involved in today's most intellectually ambitious architecture and urban plan-

5. See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 78–79.

ning. This is nowhere more evident than in the design and theoretical work of Koolhaas.

Koolhaas has been one of the most profound influences on film and media scholars writing about urban environments, especially during the past decade, as the overlapping issues of urbanization and globalization have grown more prominent in the discipline. Owing to his distinction (and notoriety) as both an architect and a theorist, Koolhaas has been a ubiquitous presence in popular and academic debates about contemporary architecture, as well as urban planning and design. But in film and media studies the Koolhaas phenomenon is the result of not only his status as a default reference point for scholars but also his unusual fascination with the interaction between architecture and image-based media, his penchant for building images into his designs and the rhetoric of his theoretical interventions. This tendency has contributed to the futuristic quality of many of his earlier projects: for example, the model for his Centre for Art and Media Technology in Karlsruhe from the late 1980s displayed on an exterior wall a massive projection of one of Richard Prince's reappropriated photographs of the Marlboro Man, allowing the building's key structural element to vacillate among a variety of possibilities, from its necessary materiality to the familiar but disposable icons of the contemporary brandscape to high-priced postmodern art.[6]

As much as any other architectural and urban theorist, Koolhaas thinks about cities — habitually imagined as the embodiment of concrete reality and durability — through the artificial spaces and ephemeral structures usually associated with the moving image. In his cinema books Gilles Deleuze identifies the capacity of film to produce new concepts and instigate new modes of philosophy;[7] Koolhaas also uses media as a theoretical tool, thinking about the basic elements of architecture and cities — space and structure — as extensions of the image rather than their conceptual opposite. However, at the same time, Koolhaas overlooks another cinematic tradition, with film envisioned not as an addition to the ever-accelerating flow of commercial images but as an exercise in testimony and durability, as an attempt to capture not the fleeting image of global capitalism but walls and structures grounded in the city and left to weather for a while.

If architects like Koolhaas imagine themselves working with the building blocks of cinema and its new media successors, there are also filmmakers who

6. For an introduction to these heavily commercialized contemporary urban environments, or brandscapes, see Anna Klingmann, *Brandscapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007).

7. See, e.g., Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 209.

aspire to the solidity and materiality of architecture. At the core of this massive body of work by Koolhaas as a thinker about architecture and urban space, we discover an energizing fascination with images, especially the screens that have functioned as the most conspicuous manifestation of modernity in the urban environments of the past century, first in movie theaters and now in the ambient televisions that anchor public space and the computer monitors and cell-phone interfaces that redefine a private realm. But his architectural and theoretical work reveals an equal and opposite disregard for images that document the upheaval experienced in the wake of these unprecedented experiments in urban form. Underlying the audacious multimedia enterprise of Koolhaas is a profound misunderstanding of the history and possibilities of the cinematic image.

The Afterlife of Manhattanism

Koolhaas began his career in the arts as a filmmaker and screenwriter in the late 1960s, and even after his training as an architect, he developed a mode of practicing and writing about architecture that reflects the lingering influence of film. In his extensive theoretical writing Koolhaas suggests that image-based media, cinema foremost among them, have become the model for even the most material and engineered of arts. His first major theoretical intervention, *Delirious New York*, is resplendent with the glamour of American cinema, and it celebrates a remembered city, a "miracle" constructed primarily from the 1890s to the beginning of World War II, well before the era of financial and architectural bankruptcy that forms the book's immediate backdrop. Published in 1978, *Delirious New York* advertises itself as a "retroactive manifesto" rather than a commentary on actually existing urbanism. The ultimate aspiration of what he calls "Manhattanism"—a goal "so ambitious that to be realized, it could never be openly stated"—was "to exist in a world totally fabricated by man," "to live *inside* fantasy."[8] The skyscraper was one of the paradigmatic icons of Manhattanism in American cinema over the course of its first half-century, as the upward trend of skylines traced the graph of capital on its vertiginous rise.[9] King Vidor's *Fountainhead* (1949) represents the apotheosis and terminus of this period of cinema, and the concluding images of

8. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli, 1994), 10.

9. In "The Fluid Metropolis," Andrea Branzi writes that the skyscraper represents the domination of previously empty space by capital, with the upward movement in skylines following the diagram of capital accumulation. See *Andrea Branzi: The Complete Works* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 50–51.

Figure 1 King Vidor's *Fountainhead*

Figure 2 King Vidor's *Fountainhead*

the film — with the camera swooping up the side of the skyscraper, reuniting the architect with his love interest, and stopping finally to display the genius astride his mammoth creation — signal its descent from delirium into dementia.

Along with the skyscraper, Koolhaas argues, the hotel was a privileged realm during the heyday of New York, and by the 1930s it had become "Hollywood's favorite subject."[10] If Hollywood constructed dreamlands on studio lots in southern California, hotels like the Waldorf were imagined as soundstages writ large, extending as high as a high-rise and as broad as a city block. The hotel obviates the need to supply a screenplay because, he writes, "a Hotel *is* a plot — a cybernetic universe with its own laws generating random but fortuitous collisions between human beings who would never have met elsewhere" (149). He adds that "with the Waldorf, the Hotel itself becomes such a movie, featuring the guests as stars and the personnel as a discreet coat-tailed chorus of extras" (150). The guest pays for admission into the drama of the hotel, and a partially scripted narrative then unfolds in a series of overdetermined locations: paths cross and glances meet in the revolving door; the backstory is presented, and the plot gains momentum on the lower floors; and after a crescendo that occurs in an ascending elevator, the summit of the building, its concrete reality and impossibly grand scale more spectacular than any Hollywood set, stages the resolution of the story. As these struc-

10. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 148.

tures rose from the ground and spread north on the island, New York was delirious, intoxicated with modernity. But, Koolhaas maintains, its postwar history has resulted in the unlearning of Manhattanism (290), and he therefore assumes the role of "ghostwriter" for a city that "passed into premature senility before its 'life' was completed" (11). Whatever once constituted the stuff of the city now survives only in spectral form.

In his later writing and his own architectural practice of the past two decades, Koolhaas traces the implications of this unlearning process, as the ecstatic urbanism of the early twentieth century is replaced by a more banal charge: to construct infinitely flexible spaces for an era marked by the "acceleration of history."[11] The word *revolution* now refers not only to world historical events but also to routine and predictable variations that result in the next product cycle in technology or the latest trend in fashion or design. The goal of architecture in this historical moment is to accommodate a series of alternately monumental and casual "miracles" that sometimes disappear into irrelevance but together eclipse Manhattan in their scale and ambition.

The apotheosis of this new ideal of flexibility is what Koolhaas calls, in a telling back-formation, the "typical plan." If the "make it new" mentality of modernism strives for atypical design, the new era in architecture is dominated by standardization and neutrality epitomized by the completely open, utterly accommodating office space, the "plan without qualities."[12] In terms that recall the cavernous space of the empty soundstage, Koolhaas emphasizes that the "Typical Plan is as empty as possible: a floor, a core, a perimeter, and a minimum of columns. All other architecture is about inclusion and accommodation, incident and event; Typical Plan is about exclusion, evacuation, non-event" (344). This mode of architecture represents the "utopia of the norm" anticipated by the most radical architectural theorists and accomplished with a minimum of fanfare in office buildings and technology parks around the world (348). If Manhattan of the early twentieth century reveled in its fabrications, the typical plan represents the eleva-

11. This phrase—"the acceleration of history"—has accumulated its own history since Daniel Halévy published his "Essay on the Acceleration of History" in 1948. Halévy argues that transformation is the normal state in modern societies, replacing the continuity of tradition with steady turnover in all realms of physical culture and ideology. See Halévy, *Essai sur l'accélération de l'histoire* (Paris: Fallois, 2001). Pierre Nora returns to this phenomenon in the first line of the introduction to his *Lieux de mémoire* series, citing this pace of change as one of the primary causes of the nostalgia and heritage booms in the 1980s. See Nora, "General Introduction: Between Memory and History," in *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, vol. 1, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

12. OMA, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL*, 2nd ed. (New York: Monacelli, 1997), 336.

tion of this founding principle above all others, a celebration of the synthetic and a reaffirmation of a dogma that "proclaims the superiority of the artificial to the real" (339). Koolhaas insists that this philosophy "remains, whether admitted or not, the true credo of Western civilization" (339). No modern institution has been more influential in disseminating that credo than the Hollywood studio, the most banal of flat, empty spaces and the height of alluring artifice.

With the concept of the "generic city," Koolhaas expands this cinematic conception of cities to an even grander geographical and conceptual scale. Insistently typical, this generic form has the advantage, Koolhaas argues, of releasing its inhabitants from the constraints of history and memory that usually accumulate in cities. "Like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning" (1250). Koolhaas continues his meditation on the "generic city" by returning once again to the example of cinema. He asks us to "imagine a Hollywood movie about the Bible" and then to follow a narrative that, within a few lines of text, links a nascent market town to the dense crowds of the contemporary city, an urban space erupting with at once vital and apocalyptic energy (1264). He then instructs us to "switch off the sound — silence, a welcome relief — and reverse the film" (1264). In this parable of the devolving city, with urbanization followed by evacuation, "silence is reinforced by emptiness: the image shows empty stalls, some debris that was trampled underfoot. Relief . . . it's over. That is the story of the city. The city is no longer. We can leave the theater now" (1264).

But the story of the modern city is here and elsewhere told through cinema: it begins with a script and continues with the construction of sets and the choreography of actors; it then reels by in fast-forward and rewinds even faster. By the time Koolhaas comes along toward the end of the twentieth century, the architect's task is no longer the construction of visionary and enduring monuments. He or she instead adapts to an environment that changes almost as rapidly as new technologies surface and fall into disuse, new brands rise and fade away, and the Generic City's allegorical film circles forward and backward through its projector. But these images race by so quickly that they can hardly be called a film anymore. When we leave the theater behind, we presumably enter a new era when cinema's paradigmatic modern conceptions of space and time have been replaced by a virtual city and new media. In his later essay "Junkspace," Koolhaas attends to the debris left behind when trends in economics and urban planning result in the demolition and reconstruction of cities, and, perhaps more important, he homes in on spaces too ubiquitous and too insignificant for mourning.[13] At the same time,

13. Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *October*, no. 100 (2002): 175–90.

the work of Koolhaas also announces the ends of cinema and the city, with neither of the icons of twentieth-century modernity capable of matching the pace of turnover in the succeeding era of globalization. Like the cities it chronicles, cinema ages rapidly in the world envisioned by Koolhaas, as it speeds precipitously from planning stage to junk, from bold prototype to glorious obsolescence.

By the time of "Junkspace," the cinema imagined by Koolhaas is no longer associated with the Hollywood studio system per se, and the most thoroughgoing experiments in generic architecture arise in more recently modernizing environments, especially in East Asia. In the 1990s, with several notable Japanese projects under way and in various stages of completion, Koolhaas realizes that "in a certain realistic way, Asia has become inevitable," especially for architects dependent on the commissions that flow together with capital investments.[14] In his "Beijing Manifesto," Koolhaas argues that the center of gravity in architecture, and the laboratory for experimentation in urban forms, has shifted to East Asia. He writes,

> In early 2002, my office received two invitations: one to propose a design for Ground Zero, the other to propose a design for the headquarters of China Central Television in Beijing. We discussed the choice over Chinese food. The life of the architect is so fraught with uncertainty and dilemmas that any clarification of the future, including astrology, is disproportionately welcome. My fortune cookie that night read: STUNNINGLY OMNIPRESENT MASTERS MAKE MINCED MEAT OF MEMORY. We chose China.[15]

His most recent major theoretical treatise and catalog of projects, *Content*, which includes "Beijing Manifesto" and other essays on that city's millennial transformation, takes this migration from West to East as its structural principle, as its sections are given geographical headings that follow a trajectory that begins with the Euro-American city and, after a detour to Lagos, the subject of another-

14. Alejandro Zaera Polo, "The Day After: A Conversation with Rem Koolhaas," *El Croquis* 79 (1996): 14. In the same interview, however, Koolhaas expressed some ambivalence about the scale of development in contemporary China. He said, "We have 20 cities in China at our doorstep that we all turned down. I do not believe at this moment that those could be legitimate projects. Although I find it fascinating, I do not believe in what is going on in China at this moment" (16). "Asia provokes an almost obscene greed to build," he added. "I want to be able to keep a distance" (18). A decade later he occupied the very center of one of the most radical urban reconstruction projects in modern history, the remaking of Beijing.

15. Rem Koolhaas, "Beijing Manifesto," *Wired*, August 2004, 120, www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.08/beijing.html.

Koolhaas/AMO book, to Asia.[16] The euphoria once rendered concrete in the skyscrapers of Manhattan now energizes Beijing, as well as Hong Kong, Seoul, and Taipei.

Modern Times

The East Asian cities that attracted the theoretical and architectural energy of Koolhaas have also produced their own mode of delirious cinema. These films usually focus on the ubiquitous icons of hypermodernity sprouting up in financial districts or alongside airport runways throughout the region. The obligatory establishing shot of the skyline, the glass curtain walls clustered downtown, the cavernous interior of the international terminal, or the view from a car zooming along the sparkling blacktop of a freshly paved highway: these are the paradigmatic images of the newly minted central business district (CBD) and the increasingly cosmopolitan megacity.

The urban space described and foreseen by Koolhaas has thus fascinated filmmakers throughout East Asia, especially in the past and present engines of the region's "economic miracles." Peering inside the steel skeletons and behind the mirrored glass, filmmakers also envision the most utilitarian of environments — the office designed under the influence of what Koolhaas calls the typical plan — as another icon of contemporary urbanity. This particular version of the infinitely flexible, utterly uprooted, post-identitarian plan without qualities is both a paradigmatic space on screen and one of the sites where films themselves are produced, as designers and programmers construct artificial cities on their computers, saving the costs associated with location shooting, that once obligatory gesture of fidelity to a specific site. The typical plan has become both the subject and the hub of a global image economy. It assumes a position of particular prominence as a metonym for a networked environment, for the kind of command and control center that Saskia Sassen sees as one of the defining characteristics of the global city. And if we agree with Mark Gottdiener that we are currently witnessing the proliferation of "themed spaces," these vacuous environments filled with fluorescent light and bluish screens communicate the theme of globalization, and they

16. AMO is the research arm of the Koolhaas-founded OMA. Both are based in Rotterdam. Rem Koolhaas and OMA-AMO, eds., *Content* (Los Angeles: Taschen, 2004). Koolhaas suggests that the acronym AMO "doesn't stand for anything specific," though he adds that the full title for this theoretical arm of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture "could be Architecture Media Organization." See his 2000 interview with Jennifer Sigler in *Index Magazine* at www.indexmagazine.com/interviews/rem_koolhaas.shtml.

Figure 3 *Infernal Affairs III*

Figure 4 *Infernal Affairs III*

do so as clearly as a Las Vegas casino displays the ostentatious inspiration of New York, Paris, or Venice.[17] These barren office spaces, stripped down to their architectural essence, then accumulate significance through the abundance of screens presumed to open outward onto a borderless network society. The bland spaces of the typical plan are temples to the computer screen in all its two-dimensional glory. Not much happens there, and nothing moves except through transmissions registered on the screen or voices, texts, and images received through the cell phone.

17. Mark Gottdiener, *The Theming of America: American Dreams, Media Fantasies, and Themed Environments*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2001).

Andy Lau and Alan Mak's *Infernal Affairs* trilogy stages much of its drama within the wide-open arena of the typical plan. The films meander constantly between the streets of Hong Kong—especially the parking garages and warehouses imagined as the home turf of the gangster—and office spaces otherwise constructed according to the commonplace blueprint of office architecture.[18] There are several Hong Kongs on display in the *Infernal Affairs* films, as the camera descends into the workspaces of the old industrial economy and ascends into high-rise office towers that crystallize the city's ultramodernity in its purest, sleekest, most minimalist form. The film cuts from a networked space—the location that is nowhere in particular but capable of accessing information from everywhere at once—to an empty parking garage or the cluttered roof of a building, with the Hong Kong panorama unfolding far beyond. These outmoded environments are sites of escape and revelation, where the Tony Leung character finally assumes his true identity and reunites with his paternal supervisor, or confronts the mole and his doppelgänger, or sits still for a moment of respite in an otherwise frenetic film, the instantly recognizable Hong Kong cityscape behind him. These rooftop scenes are paradoxical moments when he both floats above and remains tethered to a city. Like the warehouse and garage, where the material goods and machinery of the global economy are organized and stockpiled, the otherwise abandoned and forgotten rooftop has been reconceived as a Junkspace akin to those described by Koolhaas. The summit of this skyscraper sustains the routine operations of the structure rather than the exercise of naked power, and the cinematography exhibits the functionality of the building along with the spectacle of the city. The qualities that for most of the twentieth century defined modernist architecture are now accessible only while lingering on these empty rooftops, in abandoned garages, in warehouses on the outskirts of town, or in demolition sites.[19] This Hong Kong is neither a city composed of solid structures nor a site of

18. The three films of the trilogy are called *Infernal Affairs*, *Infernal Affairs II*, and *Infernal Affairs III*, and all were directed by Lau and Mak. The first was released in 2002, and the second (a prequel) and the third (a sequel) were both released in 2003.

19. The locations used for the shooting of *Infernal Affairs* run the gamut of old industrial and administrative buildings, including some that have fallen into disuse or required radical adaptations in the new economic environment. These locations include the former Hong Kong Air Cargo Terminal 2 (HACTL 2) building in the Kai Tak Airport complex (now closed and slated for redevelopment), a parking garage on the same location, and the roof of the North Point Government Offices building. For more information on the Hong Kong sites used in the making of the *Infernal Affairs* films, see *Hong Kong on Location* (Film Services Office Quarterly Newsletter), no. 8 (August–October 2002), www.fso-createhk.gov.hk/accessibility/common/newsletter/NewsletterE08.PDF.

Figure 5 *Infernal Affairs*

Figure 6 *Infernal Affairs*

disappearance.[20] From these rooftops the film imagines an infinitely deep rather than superflat space, a zone disconnected from the computer and voice networks, a location surrounded by buildings but outside architecture in both its physical and metaphorical sense. If, as Koolhaas writes, "the Generic City is the post-city being prepared on the site of the ex-city," these are the moments in *Infernal*

20. The aesthetics and politics of "disappearance" in Hong Kong art and cinema are major concerns of Ackbar Abbas's magisterial *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). In the intervening years, many of his observations about Hong Kong have proven equally true about film and visual culture in mainland China, especially his discussion of the relationship between cinema and the city. But with the reality and the aftermath of disappearance all around them, filmmakers in both locations have begun to supplement this interest in the process of disappearance with an intense focus on the material structures left

Affairs when the characters escape from whatever comes next and reimagine what used to be.[21]

Both embedded in the narrative of these films and gleaming on their surface we find a contradiction between two conceptions of the image: a model of flatness whose dynamism lies in its connection to a network of other images and the model of cinema imagined by André Bazin and others as a record of the passage of time and the persistence of environments. In his theater and cinema essays Bazin suggests that the difference between film and theater lies precisely in their relationship to architecture: "There can be no theater without architecture," he writes, since the dramatic environment necessarily ends when the painted walls reveal bare wood on their reverse side or when the actor passes from the limelight to the darkened wings of the stage.[22] But "there are no wings to the screen," as Bazin conceives it, and the structures that enclose the action in theater give way in film to what he calls "nature," which refers less to trees and sky and the other elements traditionally associated with the natural world than to whatever preexists and endures after a film is completed and its sets struck.[23] The city itself returns to nature in the neorealist films he championed in the 1940s, just as, in Bazin's sense of the term, the built environment of Hong Kong is every bit as natural as the mountains or harbor in these scenes from *Infernal Affairs*. A network society is marked by architecture without end;[24] Bazinian cinema aspires to the representation of "nature" without end; and films like *Infernal Affairs* oscillate between these two conceptions of space. The film's Chinese title—*Wu jian dao*, or *The Nonstop Path* or *The Continuous Road*—describes the condition of shuttling from one location to another without a final resting place. In its rush from prototype to junk, the writing of Koolhaas also occupies this *wu jian dao*, this placeless path, where nothing remains still enough to accumulate a solidity and a history.

The view from the roof in Jia Zhangke's *World* (*Shijie*, 2004) is very different. Jia's Beijing has not yet devolved into Junkspace because the modernization of

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behind by capitalist development. The explosion of documentary and independent filmmaking, in part a product of new, small-scale digital technology, is also inspired by this imperative to preserve in the face of a dynamic of disappearance that no longer affects Hong Kong in particular but instead emerges as the common condition of Asia's new economic centers.

21. OMA et al., *S, M, L, XL*, 1252.

22. André Bazin, "Theater and Cinema—Part II," in *What Is Cinema?* ed. and trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 1:104.

23. Bazin, "Theater and Cinema," 1:105.

24. The now habitual use of the architectural metaphor to describe data structures hints at this underlying relationship between contemporary architecture and digital media.

Figure 7 Jia Zhangke's *World*

China remains an unfinished project. For some viewers and critics, experiencing the oppressive duration of one of Jia's long takes feels like watching paint dry, but that is one purpose of this lingering and deliberate aesthetic: his films are patient chronicles of the process of construction and demolition, development and decay, and as they hesitate in this interval when modernity is at long last about to arrive, they expose the contradictions between promise and actuality. His characters wait by a platform for the anticipated train to arrive, or cluster in a theme park with miniature renditions of the major monuments of the world, or stand on top of a recently poured concrete floor while icons of globalization fly overhead. These characters inhabit the gap between the promise of a global future and the alternative modernities that have not yet come to an end.[25] In *The World* that promise takes the form of text messages, a new medium of interpersonal communication, that transition into animated sequences with characters escaping their geographical and bodily boundaries and taking flight. In one instance a bus travels along Chang'an Street, with Tiananmen Square to the right, the Forbidden City to the left, and images from New Year's celebrations around the world flashing on television screens that almost outnumber the passengers. Just as the film's main character passes the portrait of Mao Tse-tung, she checks her cell phone, and her boyfriend's brief message — "how far can you go" — launches her and the film into an

25. In his essay on *Xiao Wu*, Chris Berry calls Jia's distinctive, dilatory mode of temporality "post-socialist time" and distinguishes it from the march of "utopian progress" celebrated in socialist realist cinema. See "*Xiao Wu*: Watching Time Go By," in *Chinese Films in Focus II*, ed. Chris Berry (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 251, 255.

Figure 8 Jia Zhangke's *World*

animated reverie that remains shocking for its departure from the observational realism that distinguishes Jia's work. But these sequences help illustrate the limits of a mediated liberation: she can escape her everyday life through communication networks or visit all the wonders of the world within a theme park, but the film always resolves into another mode of image making that situates these flights of fancy within the less extravagant environments that surround the themed spaces of a globalizing Beijing. These ambient televisions and cell-phone screens bathe the contemporary city in light and provide its grandest repertoire of dreams, but they coexist with an archaic imagination that harks back simultaneously to cinema and to another moment in the history of China's modernization.

One of the most cogent rebukes to Koolhaas and his "Beijing Manifesto" is the assertion by Jia and other filmmakers that China has been constructing its own modernity for at least a century and that, like the delirious New York eulogized by Koolhaas, this aspiration "passed into premature senility before its 'life' was completed." Films like *The World* and three others directed by Jia, *Platform* (*Zhantai*, 2000), *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*, 2006), and *Twenty-Four City* (*Ershisi chengshi*, 2008), embody what Wang Hui calls an "antimodern theory of modernization."[26] Both a "critique and a reconceptualization of modernity," Chinese intellectual history in the twentieth century combined "the search for modern-

26. Wang Hui, "Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity," trans. Rebecca E. Karl, in *Whither China? Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China*, ed. Xudong Zhang (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 167.

ization and reflections on the devastating consequences of Western modernization."[27] No longer the most forward-looking of media, this cinema of persistence and endurance has become a means of exploring the seemingly obsolete utopias of the twentieth century, and in the hands of filmmakers like Jia, Zhang Lu, Hou Hsiao-Hsien, and countless others from China, Taiwan, and other sites of the region's "economic miracles," the camera has become an instrument of this antimodern aspiration toward modernity.

Weathering Modernity

For some contemporary architects and critics, cinema persists as a cultural reference point and intellectual paradigm, exerting a gravitational pull back to another era in the shared history of the medium and of cities. A residual fascination with cinema is apparent, for example, in the work of Steven Holl, whose design for the Linked Hybrid or MOMA apartment and retail complex in Beijing—a ring of eight towers connected by elevated walkways and located just outside the city's Second Ring Road—features a cinema at both the physical and conceptual core of the project. In a 2006 video interview contained in the promotional materials for the development, Holl emphasizes the importance of the movie theater as a "gathering place" at the middle of the massive structures, an attraction that draws crowds into the complex, and a catalyst that makes the boundaries between inside and outside more porous. For this reason, Holl suggests, "the cinema forms a central part of the entire city within a city." But for Holl and his partners in the design, cinema is also "a microcosm because when you look at the way the looping bridges connect everything in the project . . . that's a cinematic adventure, the . . . feeling of moving through a loop in space, and moving through a loop in space at the base of the project, so that cinema becomes, in a way, an emblem." This desire to incorporate the materiality and metaphor of cinema into the project ultimately results in images projected on both the screen and the exterior walls of the theater, as (at least in the design stage) the films shown inside the theater are also displayed outside and reflected onto the surface of a nearby pond.

The architectural qualities accentuated by Holl in his theoretical writings and this Linked Hybrid design—porosity and luminosity—allude at least as much to the materials and immateriality of cinema, its apertures and light, as they do to bricks and mortar or stone masonry.[28] In the animated models fea-

27. Wang, "Contemporary Chinese Thought," 167, 168.

28. For a catalog that explores the development of this theme in Holl's work, see *Luminosity/Porosity* (Tokyo: Toto Shuppan, 2006).

Figure 9 *Goddess* on the screen of Steven Holl's Linked Hybrid

tured in the promotional video, the city itself is constructed of the stuff of cinema, as the walls of the theater and surfaces of the water are transformed into film screens, and the entire space revolves around an open-air theater featuring Ruan Lingyu in *Goddess* (Shennu; dir. Wu Yonggang, 1934). But this elevation of cinema to a position of physical and conceptual centrality also divorces these images from the history of cinema. The doomed and tragic heroine of 1930s leftist cinema has been retooled as a larger-than-life icon of a glorious Chinese cinematic tradition, and the character shunned by the Shanghai of her time reappears in Beijing to merge with the walls of the city. The prostitute played by Ruan becomes the object of surveillance in *Goddess*, and the film's process shots appear to isolate her from the city and present her relationship to this budding commercial and cosmopolitan center as a question rather than an axiom. As the images from *Goddess* become an architectural element, they lose their specific relationship to the social realism that distinguished Ruan's films until her scandal-induced suicide at age twenty-four. Holl engages directly with cinema in his design for the Linked Hybrid and lavishes attention on the most venerated images from China's silver screen. But flickering on its walls and screen are several potentially conflicting conceptions of cinema, ranging from the age-old dream of a medium to document the political realities of the present to the desire for a museum-like medium that preserves the national past in all its

Figure 10 Ruan Lingyu and Shanghai in *Goddess*

spectacle and splendor. Elsewhere in Beijing, a city in the process of demolishing and burying its modern past, cinema, one of the most important archives of twentieth-century history, plays a crucial role in the reconstruction of the city, even in the work of architects with less reverence for tradition than Holl, including those who trace their inspiration and proclaim their allegiance to a new era of networks and information.

Perhaps the most profound example of this desire to inhabit the unfinished space of modernity comes not from any film but from the structures that once lingered in the shadow of the CCTV tower in Beijing. The largest building ever commissioned from Koolhaas and his OMA, this massive, $700 million complex dominates the heart of the city's new CBD, the site of approximately three hundred skyscrapers to be constructed over the next decade and the launch pad for Beijing's Manhattan.[29] But even as the building itself was under construction, some of the site's old work-unit housing remained, as families refused to relin-

29. This comparison between the Beijing's CBD and Manhattan has become a staple of media coverage of the CCTV tower and contemporary Chinese architecture more generally. See, e.g., Jasper Becker, "Empire Building in Beijing," *Independent* (London), March 24, 2003. Holl's promotional video for the Linked Hybrid project in Beijing also makes that comparison. For a recent history of the development of the CBD and the place of the CCTV tower within it, see Wang Jun, *Caifang benshang de chengshi* (*The City in My Interview Notebook*) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing, 2008).

quish their homes and accept relocation to the suburbs, where generic cities rise with less fanfare. These families used the walls of their building to display messages redolent with socialist history of the past fifty years: they attacked CCTV officials for stealing the people's property and appealed to the Communist Party for remedy according to the law; they condemned the obsession with the Olympics, the building spree it engendered, and the dislocation that resulted; and they denounced the feudal "darkness" emanating from the station and its leaders. This is Junkspace with a history that both Reform-era Chinese governments and Koolhaas are erasing as rapidly as possible.[30] Koolhaas has argued that the thoroughgoing urbanization and social engineering projects realized in the Maoist era have paved the way for this current wave of demolition and reconstruction. "Particularly under the regime of communism," he suggests, "the entire content of daily life has really been 're-invented,' and architecture was seen as one of the instruments, with which this daily life could be 're-written,' almost like a script."[31]

For Scheeren, an OMA architect and the principal supervisor on the CCTV site in Beijing, this history of radical transformation produces a particularly amenable laboratory for urban experimentation, though he invokes the metaphor of architecture rather than cinema to describe this state of perpetual upheaval. He writes,

> China appears to have a willingness and ability to courageously face up to new situations and work enthusiastically towards an idea of progress — even if these radical changes imply the sometimes brutal erasure of past conditions. (In this sense, it is perhaps a truly "architectural" country, for

30. In addition to its implications for the urban environment of Beijing, the CCTV tower has been the subject of significant debate and controversy in China since the project was first awarded to OMA. A group of distinguished architects and engineers questioned the structural integrity of the building's leaning tower design, and a growing number of professional and anonymous Internet commentators have asserted that the design of the CCTV building and its neighboring Television Cultural Center (TVCC) was intended to represent female and male genitalia. The circulation of suggestive proposals for the cover of Koolhaas/OMA-AMO's *Content* fomented those attacks, but in a posting on the firm's Web site and in a series of media interviews (including one on CCTV) Koolhaas responded that the covers were produced by the book's designers and never seriously considered by the authors and architects. The TVCC building, also the site of a Mandarin Oriental Hotel, was badly damaged in a fire on February 9, 2009, the last day of the Lunar New Year. The inferno appeared to be the result of an errant fireworks display that ignited a structure whose fire protection systems were not yet fully operational. One firefighter was killed in the blaze, and several arrests and impending trials have been reported in the Chinese media. The main CCTV tower was untouched by the fire.

31. Ma Weidong, "Interview with Rem Koolhaas," *CCTV by OMA / Rem Koolhaas and Ole Scheeren*, special issue, *Architecture and Urbanism*, July 2005, 12.

Figure 11 Graffiti protesting "robbery" of the "people's property" for CCTV headquarters

Figure 12 Residents of the same building air grievances about displacement caused by Olympic construction

architecture has always implied not only the aspect of building and creating, but also that of destruction and replacement.)[32]

In the context of Chinese history and the CCTV site, both cinema and architecture are defined primarily, perhaps even essentially, as forces of erasure and eradication. If contemporary Chinese filmmakers are undergoing a moment of exceptional productivity and creativity, as I think they are, that success is the result of not only an attention to the Generic City under construction, a fascination with the abundant icons of globalization that dominate the skyline in part of Beijing and even more of Shanghai and Shenzhen, but also an attempt to document the age of the city, to focus on spaces where other versions of modernity were constructed and allowed to weather.

In Koolhaas's critical and architectural engagement with the future of the moving image, he implicitly addresses an age-old question: what is cinema? And his

32. Ole Scheeren, "Introduction: Made in China," *CCTV by OMA / Rem Koolhaas and Ole Scheeren*, special issue, *Architecture and Urbanism*, July 2005, 4.

Figure 13 Character for "preserve" painted over "demolish," outside CCTV site

response begins with a telling retrospective glance: cinema is like new media but older or slower or less flexible. The film is over, he suggests, and has been replaced by more nimble digital forms, an accurate assertion in the Chinese market, where by and large urban audiences have left the theater. Cinema now appears on a much smaller and intimate scale, in pirated DVDs consumable in the privacy of the home, in videos downloaded from the Internet, and on cell phones designed as multimedia platforms. Moving images also surface on a much grander scale, as enormous LED screens dominate public spaces and ambient television becomes one of the most prevalent forms of mass communication.

As Holl's Linked Hybrid attests, buildings themselves are designed to shift effortlessly between structure and screen. The CCTV tower has already doubled as a substrate for video images, as on June 12, 2008, a series of Nike-produced short films were projected on the walls of the building in anticipation of the Olympic Games. The opening ceremony of the games — famously directed by China's

best-known filmmaker, Zhang Yimou — was most remarkable for launching cinema into an expanded field, as a massive LED screen rose and fell, becoming both a horizontal surface for calligraphic ballet and a vertical plane for the display of moving images. Cinematic images were also projected onto the steel-mesh scrim at the top of the iconic "Bird's Nest" stadium, as the spectacle began to overtop its architectural environment and overflow onto the streets of the city. The image floats away from the silver screen and onto the steel and glass surface of China's new architectural wonders, blurring the boundaries between cinema and the city. Like Koolhaas and the CCTV tower, the opening ceremony of the Olympics both adopts the latest image-making technologies and heralds the culmination of the becoming cinematic of Beijing. Koolhaas and the other figures currently reshaping Chinese cities announce the exhaustion of the modern project embodied in film and the arrival of a new era in the history of media and urban space.

Content — the magazine-like Koolhaas/AMO-OMA book that celebrates an aesthetic of consumption and disposal — predicts this phenomenon with characteristic panache, as it announces the obsolescence of the cinematic metaphor that once allowed architects and theorists to associate themselves with the dynamic modernity of moving images. Heeding its own calls to "Go East" and to engage with the newest of media, the book crescendos toward a series of brief concluding essays devoted to the CCTV tower in Beijing, including an excerpt from Rene Daalder's "Forward Compatibility: A Proposition for the Future of Media Integration in China." Daalder (who once produced a Koolhaas-scripted film) envisions this architectural landmark as a crystallization of the changes taking place across the global mediascape, and he jettisons the most prominent theoretical conceptions of cinema inherited from the twentieth century.[33] Film no longer captures and projects the artistic equivalent of the pulsating and ever-changing energy of the city, a mechanically produced archive of documentary images, or some combination of those contradictory impulses toward transformation and preservation: "change mummified," in Bazin's words.[34] Rather than an archive of moving images recorded in the past, the headquarters of CCTV will become a hub for information in the process of perpetual transmission. The ideal for the new architecture is the liveness and immediacy commonly associated with media that can be recorded, compressed into a digital format, uploaded to a server, and disseminated in a matter of minutes. The digital revolution also speeds the demise

33. The term *mediascape* is borrowed from Arjun Appadurai's foundational essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 27–47.

34. Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *What Is Cinema*, 1:15.

of the old modernist ideal of medium specificity, as the generic file characterized primarily by ease of circulation replaces the filmed image linked at the moment of its production to a particular time and place. Daalder writes that "instead of being like the production centers of today, the TV studio of the 21st century is likely to bear more resemblance to a central bank credit card processing plant, where terabytes of information are stored for immediate or near-real time access. The concept of video or audio footage will become obsolete, replaced by the generic 'digital file.' "[35] Within these banks of computers the generic city begins to disseminate information conceived in its own image.

The emergence of China's megacities unfolds within this longer history of both urban space and the moving image, and the construction of the CCTV tower has signaled a symbolic transition from the bygone era of Manhattan's skyscrapers and their cinema to an age of new media and the massive physical structures that house the real-world command and control functions for this virtual domain. For Scheeren, the tower's design and iconic presence become the physical manifestation of a digital revolution founded on the frictionless flow of the most ethereal substance, information. He writes:

> In the context of a media organization such as CCTV, whose productions are omnipresent, yet virtual (television), and whose production processes will soon also be virtual (with digitisation leading to ever-increasing fragmentation and isolation — until the actual spatial environment becomes almost completely irrelevant), architecture suddenly assumes a new meaning: the symbolic manifestation of the place of (reality) production.[36]

With space condemned to irrelevance in both the creation of media and the construction of architecture, the primary reference point for the CCTV tower is no longer its proximate neighborhood or the city itself, but "the presence of media and information."[37] Daalder identifies the genius of this iconic structure in its capacity to become virtual like the digital files constantly coursing through its computer networks: "Due to historical and geographic circumstance, CCTV's headquarters in Beijing will inevitably become an important hub in this evolution of the global media landscape. . . . As CCTV's digital brain becomes ever more transparent and ubiquitous, it will be precisely the immaterial elusiveness of tomorrow's networked world that will give the new building's presence its great-

35. Rene Daalder, "Forward Compatibility: A Proposition for the Future of Media Integration in China," in Koolhaas and OMA-AMO, *Content*, 504.

36. Scheeren, "Introduction: Made in China," 5.

37. Scheeren, "Introduction: Made in China," 5.

est importance."[38] If, as Deleuze argued, cinema has become a mode of thinking and "the brain is the screen," Daalder anticipates a future when this cerebral screen is everywhere but unseen and an intricately interlaced media network has become the tissue and intercellular matrix of society.

The most ambitious architecture then becomes a physical manifestation of that virtual realm and its attendant ideology. Ambitious corporations and government agencies once erected monuments that corresponded to the economic and political fortunes of the nation. The delirious downtowns of cities like New York granted a physical form to that narrative of economic and social progress, and the upward-reaching skyline rendered the diagram of capital accumulation in stone and steel. A monument to China's burgeoning political and economic clout, the CCTV tower serves a similar symbolic function. As the regular geometric pattern on its exterior devolves into a seemingly erratic series of lines, the building alludes to the asymmetrical, zigzagging structural elements that support its two leaning towers. But in their conspicuous display of irregularity, these lines also embody the ideal of self-organization promised by networks that escape the grid-like system of city streets or the hierarchical structure of corporate or government institutions. Yet these lines are traced on the surface of the most prominent building on the Beijing skyline, the second largest office building in the world after the Pentagon, and the headquarters of China's state-run television corporation. The structure signifies the capture and institutionalization of new media, along with an associated philosophical apparatus organized around the concepts of the perpetually convoluting, self-regulating network and the infinitely adaptable screen.

Underlying and animating the design of the CCTV tower complex is the promise of emancipation offered by new media, especially their capacity to flee from or redirect the power of institutions like CCTV itself. But in the aftermath of the demolition and construction initiated by the project, that utopian possibility begins to recede, and the microrevolutions imagined through digital media become completely compatible with the exercise of raw power on the grandest possible scale. While for Koolhaas celebration of the Generic City and denunciation of identity were once liberating avant-garde gestures, contemporary struggles over the right to the city in China repeatedly invoke the specificity of its identity and history as a socialist state. The generic, ultramodern, mediatized Beijing is possible only through the erasure of competing utopian claims that nevertheless linger on—in deliberately archaic sites, slogans, and media—after their supposed demise.

38. Daalder, "Forward Compatibility," 504.

Figure 14 CCTV tower and apartment buildings to the east

The recent history of Beijing and its CBD challenges the widespread confidence in the revolutionary potential of intellectual models based on an idealized vision of emerging media forms. In their fascination with immediacy and the dynamics of instantaneous transmission, they ignore the temporal dimension that once fascinated philosophers of cinema. Film records the passage of time, and it therefore exists in a privileged relationship with architecture imagined neither as an embodiment of the immediacy of media networks nor as an unchanging monument to a seemingly eternal state or corporate power. Instead, an architecture constructed in the image of cinema would record the process of change inherent but often overlooked in the planning, construction, and life of buildings. Cinema would be intimately connected to the process of weathering.

In Bazin's essay on *The Bicycle Thief*, he suggests that the film's most profound experiment with "pure cinema" occurs in the scene when father and son dash under the eaves to escape the falling rain, and the camera lingers on their faces as they listen to the unintelligible voices of German bystanders beside them and wait for the deluge to end.[39] Time passes, and the film becomes both a carefully orchestrated narrative and a celluloid record of the accidents that occurred in the process of filming. On the one hand, there is architecture, and on the other, the weather; Bazin celebrated a mode of cinema that disclosed the interaction between the two.

As Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow write in *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time*:

> The fact of weathering inheres in all construction. No architect can avoid this fact; it was never escaped in the past, nor can it be in the present. Weathering reminds one that the surface of a building is ever-changing. While a potential nuisance, the transformation of a building's surface can also be positive in that it can allow one to recognize the necessity of change, and to resist the desire to overcome fate — an aspiration that dominated much of modernist architectural thought through its resistance to time. The preoccupation with the image or appearance of the building in current practice is in part symptomatic of this desire.[40]

As the spectacular view of particular iconic structures becomes increasingly important in the marketing of corporations and cities alike, these images become the eternal image of the durable institutions they house and the digital emblem ready for instantaneous transmission over the Web. Mostafavi and Leatherbarrow write, "Images are media of representation that communicate a building's style, character, and identity and are often thought to do so without change, like the printed word" (120). The authors call for an architecture premised not on the finality of the image or word but on the necessity of perpetual "refinishing" (120).

The most recent writing by Koolhaas and OMA-AMO suggests that the era when cinema reflected the delirium of the modern city has long since passed, as has the period when cinema documented the constant refinishing of that incomplete modern project. Instead, the most dynamic cities, including the megalopolis of Beijing, are reinventing themselves under the influence of a new conception of

39. Bazin, "The Bicycle Thief," in *What Is Cinema*, 2:52.

40. Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 116–20.

digital media. Previous imaginations of a utopian future have been relegated to the archive along with the medium that developed in tandem with it, and a new ideal inspired by capitalist globalization is inscribed on the surface of the city and circulated through emerging screen cultures. But in the films of Jia and his contemporaries, with their relentless images of deep space and time passing, we glimpse another conception of cinema, one that exists in the duration between the prototype and its generic progeny and between modernization and the Junkspace it leaves behind. Their films are envisioned not as additions to the ever-accelerating flow of commercial images but as exercises in testimony and duration, as attempts to capture not the flowing image of capitalism but the material structures that preceded the age of globalization and the stain of history they accumulate on their surfaces. Taken together, they constitute a retrospective manifesto for cinema. And the reinvigorated cinema in contemporary China is at its most profound and provocative when it arises from an environment like the one that previously surrounded the CCTV construction site, with the unstable present in the process of construction, the global future just beyond, and the modern past written everywhere on its walls.