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24 FRAMES A SECOND
THE COSMOPOLITAN CINEPHILIA OF SOUTH KOREAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

BY

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DISertation
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Abstract

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary ethnography of the culture of young cinephiles in South Korea where I conducted research in 2008-9. The ethnographic heart of my work is a university film club (*tongari*) located in Seoul. I also observed a student-run film magazine as well as major and minor international film festivals. Demographically, the age cohort of university students represents the most active users of film in South Korea which boasts the fifth-largest film market in the world. I have approached the film club as a speech community from which I collected a group discourse on film and spectatorship as an intimate window on the culture of local cinephiles. Based on my fieldwork, I make a central argument that cinephilic culture as exemplified by the film club is largely cosmopolitan in nature, reflecting the enormous circulation of international movies and film scholarship across national borders. The opening chapters first discuss how cinephiles have come to share cosmopolitan tastes through various means such as art houses in Seoul; the tradition of watching canonical films and studying film theory in university film clubs that emerged on university campuses in Seoul in the 1980s; and the Internet and personal computing technologies. The core chapters examine precisely how (close reading) and why (affective and personal experience) young cinephiles watch global cinemas that they encounter through theaters, friends, and the Internet. In these chapters, concomitant to my observation that the culture of South Korean cinephiles is largely cosmopolitan, I illustrate how the culture of studying American film scholarship as well as consuming Western classics and art films does not necessarily sustain the traditionally unequal power relationship implicated in cross-border cultural transactions. The last chapter, moreover,
situates cosmopolitan cinephilia within the contemporary social and cultural context of South Korea, which is most notably marked by neoliberal and multicultural politics.
Acknowledgements

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Note to Reader

All transcriptions of Korean in this dissertation follow the McCune-Reischauer romanization system except in the cases where personal names and other proper nouns have been romanized previously (e.g., Kim Dae-jung; Yonsei University). East Asian names are presented with surname first and given name last even in the cases where names in Western form are in wide circulation (e.g., Ozu Yasujiro). All English translations, including literature, quotations, and interviews from both Korean language materials and fieldwork, are my own unless otherwise noted.
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List of Key Informants

I understood that one should never underestimate the intelligence and comprehension of the audience, despite what professional distributors and the purveyors of big spectacles say. - Agnès Varda

*Some of the details in the descriptions are not mentioned in the dissertation itself.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Is a name I borrow from Alejandro Amenábar who directed <em>Tesis</em> (1996) on which Alex led a group discussion (Class(^2) of 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director Lee</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Is his nickname (he has a different last name); wants to become a filmmaker (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haejin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Joined the club “to study film more systematically” (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hongjun</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Wants to become a film critic (2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juhee</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Has taught <em>Film Art</em> ten times in the club (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Says that using Bordwell is “a different kind of fun” (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junsu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Is an alumnus who visits the campus the most often (2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mina</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Backed out of the club for a semester when the first meeting she attended was on the semiotics of <em>Breathless</em> (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960) (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangjin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Wants to become a filmmaker (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seyun</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Likes feminist movies; has spent a lot of time at Seoul Art Cinema (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shinu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Is a horror junkie and an excellent teacher of <em>Film Art</em> (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taemin</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Explains why it makes economic sense to watch foreign movies (2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Is the name of his favorite film persona; joined a small group in Cinepol from another university film club (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yewon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Talks about an “(un)balanced diet” in film (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


2 The class (*hakbŏn*) refers to the year of entrance, not graduation, as it does in the United States.
Filmography

After Midnight (Davide Ferrario, 2004 | Italy)
Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (Lumièrè Brothers, 1896 | France)
Au Revoir Les Enfants (Louis Malle, 1987 | France, W. Germany, Italy)
Battle Royale (Fukasaku Kinji, 2000 | Japan)
Boy Meets Girl (Leos Carax, 1984 | France)
Breathless (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960 | France)
Children of Men (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006 | US, UK)
Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, 1941 | US)
Contempt (Jean-Luc Godard, 1963 | France, Italy)
Courage under Fire (Edward Zwick, 1996 | US)
Dumb & Dumber (Peter Farrelly, 1994 | US)
Edward Scissorhands (Tim Burton, 1990 | US)
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Michel Gondry, 2004 | US)
Friend (Kwak Kyung-taek, 2001 | S. Korea)
Happiness Does Not Come in Grades (Kang Woo-suk, 1989 | S. Korea)
Hiroshima Mon Amour (Alain Resnais, 1959 | France, Japan)
Histoire(s) du Cinéma (Jean-Luc Godard, 1988-1998 | France)
JSA: Joint Security Area (Park Chan-wook, 2000 | S. Korea)
La Strada (Federico Fellini, 1954 | Italy)
Love Letter (Iwai Shunji, 1995 | Japan)
Missing (Costa-Gavras, 1982 | US)
My Sassy Girl (Kwak Jae-yong, 2001 | S. Korea)
Ray-Ban (Jang Hyun-soo, 2000 | S. Korea)
Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954 | US)
Severed (Carl Bessai, 2005 | Canada)
Solyaris (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972 | Soviet Union)
Stranger than Paradise (Jim Jarmusch, 1984 | US, W. Germany)
Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans (F.W. Murnau, 1927 | US)
Swiri (Kang Je-Kyu, 1999 | S. Korea)
Take Care of My Cat (Jeong Jae-eun, 2001 | S. Korea)
The 400 Blows (François Truffaut, 1959 | France)
The Butterfly (Moon Seung-wook, 2001 | S. Korea)
The Contact (Chang Yoon-hyun, 1997 | S. Korea)
The Dreamers (Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003 | UK, France, Italy)
The Flame Girl (Chŏn Hyŏngsŏk, 2008 | Sogang University)
The Foreign Duck, the Native Duck and God (Nakamura Yoshihiro, 2007 | Japan)
The Letter (Lee Jung-gook, 1997 | S. Korea)
The Postman Always Rings Twice (Tay Garnett, 1946 | US)
The Tin Drum (Volker Schlöndorff, 1979 | W. Germany, France, Poland, Yugoslavia)
Titanic (James Cameron, 1997 | US)
To where do love, sky, and one flow (Yi Hyeri, 2008 | Ewha Womans University)
Waikiki Brothers (Lim Sun-rye, 2001 | S. Korea)
Winter Woman (Kim Hosŏn, 1977 | S. Korea)
Yol (Serif Gören and Yilmaz Güney, 1982 | Turkey, Switzerland, France)
Acronyms

AOL  America Online
Arplus  Artplus Cinema Network
BBS  Bulletin board system
CIFF  Chungmuro International Film Festival
Collective  Seoul Film Collective
*Kubo the Film Critic*  *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic* (2009)
EWFS  East-West Film Society
KIFV  Association of Korean Independent Film & Video
Film Art  *Film Art: An Introduction* (first ed. 1979)
Flame  *The Flame Girl* (2008)
Forum  Munhwa Mirae Forum
JIFF  Jeonju International Film Festival
*Kubo the Novelist(s)*  *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist(s)* (1934; 1969-1972)
P2P  Peer-to-peer
PIFF  Pusan International Film Festival
Pilsa  *P’ilŭm e kwanhan tchalbŭn sarang*
Playground  Chungmuro Intermedia Playground
SNU  Seoul National University
*To where*  *To where do love, sky, and one flow* (2008)
VOD  Video-on-demand
The purpose of this dissertation is, first, to introduce the culture of young cinephiles—film buffs—in contemporary South Korea. As the dissertation title suggests, I propose that the local cinephilic culture is marked, in general, by cosmopolitan tastes and their love and intimate knowledge of the film medium. The second purpose of the dissertation, in relation to the finding that South Korean cinephiles generally share cosmopolitan tastes, is to consider how movies and film scholarship travel as cultural texts. The particular site I have chosen to focus on in order to study the cinephilic culture is a university film club (tongari) located in Seoul although I also incorporate fieldwork I have done elsewhere as I describe in detail below. In this opening chapter, I introduce three key characteristics of the club members as both cinephiles and university students living in South Korea today. They are, in short, studious and serious, have cosmopolitan tastes, and live as neoliberal subjects. I discuss, moreover, how the topography of Seoul as an ideal place for movie lovers articulates to the cosmopolitan cinephilia of university students, a discussion through which I also introduce recent developments in South Korean cinema including the hallyu (Korean wave) and the New Korean Cinema.

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3 I could have translated tongari as a “circle” or “group” since university clubs used to be (but no longer) called “circles” (ssŏk’ŭl) in South Korea while the typical equivalent of tongari in the American English would be a “[student] group.” I, however, use “club” because “group” (kŭrup) connotes chaebŏl (conglomerates) and so-called “idol” bands in the Korean language. Last but not least, such groups particularly in the Internet space are most often called as clubs (kŭllŏp) or cafes (kap’ê) in Korean.
Purpose

This dissertation, first and foremost, is intended to be an introduction to and an informed commentary on—by way of ethnographic fieldwork—the culture of cinephiles in contemporary South Korea. As a study about people who watch movies, it is, on the one hand, modest in its scope and aspirations. The justification to study what is as mundane as watching movies, however, is that a close look at the banality will shed a different light on the cultural and political significance of local cinephilia.

By local cinephilia, first of all, I refer to the subculture of cinephiles in a particular place at a particular time (that is South Korea in the latter half of the 2000s) rather than the taste and habits of these cinephiles, which is, as I have noted above, markedly cosmopolitan. They are, so to speak, spectatorial globetrotters who watch movies from all around the world. My take on local cinephilia, in this manner, echoes Mike Featherstone (1996: 63) who argues that

[...] the locality is no longer the prime referent of our experiences. Rather, we can be immediately united with distant others with whom we can form a “psychological neighborhood” or “personal community” through telephone or the shared experiences of the news of the “generalized elsewhere” we get from watching television.

The term local, in this sense, not only signifies South Korean specificities but also is intimately connected to the trans-local theme of cosmopolitan tastes in global cinemas. By the word cinephilia, moreover, I convey the love of film that involves varying degrees of devotion beyond leisure. The type of cinephilia I introduce implicates the hard “work” of knowing film as both an artistic medium that has its own language (chapter 3) as well as a form of art that has a vast and diverse body of work (chapters 2, 4). Yet many cinephiles find this knowledge pleasurable to the degree that their devotion to cinema hits a quasi-religious note at times. As an example of such cinephilia, I point later in this chapter to the story of a woman who narrates how she came to
love cinema after watching *and* writing about the films of Eric Rohmer. As for the cultural significance of this *local cinephilia*, I will say for now that the everyday habits and practices of the young cinephiles who use American film scholarship and watch foreign art films point to the shifting power dynamics in the postcolonial world in which it is increasingly difficult to evaluate cultural transactions that are often deemed neocolonial in nature. As I consider the cultural significance of watching movies in all its banality, I must note that I am inspired by how objects as ordinary as soap powders and detergents can be deconstructed of their mythical magnitude (see Barthes 1972).

The apologetics aside, however, visuality is nonetheless of critical importance to contemporary culture as Michel de Certeau (1984: xxi) elaborates in the following.

> From TV to newspapers, from advertising to all sorts of mercantile epiphanies, our society is characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown and transmuting communication into a visual journey. It is a sort of *epic* of the eye and of the impulse to read. The economy itself, transformed into a “semeiocracy” (26), encourages a hypertrophic development of reading. Thus, for the binary set production-consumption, one would substitute its more general equivalent: writing-reading. Reading (an image or a text), moreover, seems to constitute the maximal development of the passivity assumed to characterize the consumer, who is conceived of as a voyeur … in a “show biz society.” (original italics)

In his regrets of the “cancerous growth of vision,” Certeau’s views are reminiscent of Guy Debord’s observation on society as spectacle in which all that used to be lived in real life has become a representation to the extent that images have come to mediate human relationships (1967: 7, 16). The saturation of visuality, however, is at the same time quite irrevocable in a way that perhaps recalls how “one thinks from the worlded world” (Spivak 1998: 43). While it is beyond the scope of my thesis to diagnose whether visuality is a carcinogen in contemporary society, I draw on Certeau’s idea that the act of reading constitutes the most productive performance of the voyeur-consumer who is irrevocably faced with a sea of images.

Reading, or the art of making meaning, is in effect a central part of the cinephilic culture that I introduce in this dissertation as I examine how a group of cinephiles use, for instance,
American film scholarship as the hermeneutical instrument of choice to interpret the truly wide variety of films they watch. The second purpose of the dissertation, although not in importance, is therefore to consider how movies and film scholarship travel as cultural—artistic and academic, to be more specific—texts. The principal dilemma in what is otherwise a picture of communication and connectivity is that cross-cultural or trans-lingual movement of texts including cinema assumes more often than not an unequal power relationship between two (or more) actors in the postcolonial world (see Liu 1995). What I propose to do, however, is to move beyond the criticism of an always already uneven playing field and consider film as a way to examine the nature of contact between peoples and cultures that would not otherwise have interacted with each other (see Sakai 2005).

The gist of my arguments, in this particular regard, is that it is possible to see positive changes in the historically asymmetrical power relationship between the West and the Rest in the culture of cinephiles whose tastes in film are by and large cosmopolitan, and as such pose a postcolonial quandary. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1996) have rejected more than a decade ago what they call the “‘hypodermic needle’ theory” and observed that the global circulation of media had become much more interactive in contemporary society. The kind of change I discuss is, likewise, not a directional reversal of power dynamics that the West now is the putative “recipient” of the culture and knowledge of the Rest but rather a qualitative change in that the contact between the two transcends, at least in part, (post)colonial geopolitics. To put things in to perspective, I propose that the ways in which the particular group of cinephiles I

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4 Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that “the media imperialism thesis needs drastic retooling in the contemporary area. First, it is simplistic to imagine an active First World simply forcing its products on a passive Third World. Second, global mass culture does not so much replace local culture as coexist with it, providing a cultural lingua franca. Third, the imported mass culture can also be indigenized, put to local use, given a local accent. Fourth, there are powerful reverse currents as a member of Third World countries (Mexico, Brazil, India, Egypt) dominate their own markets and even become cultural exporters” (149).
introduce in this dissertation watches movies and uses scholarship often of Euro-American origins are more communicative than colonizing. For the positive stance I elect to take, I take comfort in agreeing with Edward Said that “In human history there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society, and this is obviously what makes change possible, limits power in Foucault’s sense, and hobbles the theory of that power” (1982: 216). In specific, though I repeat myself a few times in this chapter, I question the soft power (see Fraser 2003; Nye 1990, 2004) of Western scholarship by locating the ownership of theory in the actual practice of the regime of knowledge (chapter 3). I suggest, moreover, an alternative mode of spectatorship that exceeds the alleged postcolonial habitus which renders it easy for viewers to privilege certain films over others based on national or continental brand (chapter 4). I also consider the arguably neoliberal logic in the audience’s claim to the rights to choice in film—a manifestation of their cosmopolitan tastes—that contests, however inadvertently, neoliberalism of the current Lee Myung-bak administration (2008-2012) (chapter 5).

The study of the transnational traffic of film and film scholarship, moreover, makes this project an instance of the burgeoning transnational cinema studies. With a particular focus on the nexus between the movement and consumption of texts in local film culture, this dissertation makes its contribution by engaging with culture as a network of signification: why and how people watch movies. In the inaugural article of the journal Transnational Cinemas (2010), Will Higbee and Song Hwee Lim identify three major approaches to transnational cinema studies (Higbee and Lim 2010; see also Bergfelder 2005; Žurovičová and Newman 2010; Ezra and Rowden 2006). The first of these is to focus on the border-crossing movements of films and filmmakers in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition, of which international co-
productions are a salient example (e.g., Joo 2007). The second approach considers transnational cinema as a regional phenomenon such as in the case of the Chinese language films or the Nordic and European films (e.g., Lu 1997; Nestingen and Elkington 2005; Rivi 2007). The last approach relates to diasporic and exilic cinemas that challenge the Western construct of nation and national culture (e.g., Naficy 2001). As such, the adjectives that describe transnational cinemas abound across the field of study including but not limited to interconnected, intercultural, multicultural, pan-ethnic, supranational, accented, polyphonic, and interstitial. This dissertation contributes to transnational cinema studies by focusing on consumption, which Higbee and Lim call attention to as “the largely neglected question of the audience” (18). This is perhaps why cosmopolitan is a word that is much less encountered in transnational cinema studies. While I do not suggest that the study of cross-cultural flows and encounters is the only way to engage productively with film culture of South Korea, I leave the reader with the challenge that it takes more than a survey of South Korean cinema to understand the local film culture.

**The cinephiles**

The primary way in which I study film culture is to take cinephilic discourse—talk and writings about film—as a window on local cinephilia and its cultural or geopolitical significance (Quinn 2005). I have collected the talk of cinephiles, in particular, at a university film club as a speech community where I was able to listen to them in a focused and intimate way. Although I do include the examples of other age groups in the dissertation, I hold that the culture of South Korean cinephiles cannot be considered without taking college-age men and women into account as it is this particular age group that represents the heaviest viewers of film in the country.
To put it differently, youth constitute a taste group that is largely responsible for shaping film culture despite their position as a numeric minority.

Youth, moreover, have been central actors in the history of cinephilia. It was in fact youth that had the greatest bearing on the global discourse on film during the “great period of cinephilia” (Keathley 2006: 9), which occurred in France roughly between the end of the World War II and the aftermath of the May revolution of 1968. The young François Truffaut at the age of twenty two, for instance, wrote his highly influential “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” (1954), which is credited with having put the auteurist theory in practice around the globe. From the pens of Cahiers du Cinéma writers, concepts such as mise-en-scène traveled, allowing the general public to share the language of the experts. There was, in other words, a strong sense of cultural cinephilia that is experienced differently from individual cinephilia (Keathley 2006: 39). A considerable portion of cinephiles in South Korea today appear, in fact, to feel an imaginary affinity to this period, however, not necessarily because French cinephilia is somehow trans-historical or trans-local but rather because they identify with the intense experience of film that this period signifies, a recent representation of which include The Dreamers (Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003), a popular work among film buffs whose text itself is thickly cinephilic with, to say the very least, the iconic “New York Herald Tribune!” I encountered, as a matter of fact, references to the Langlois Affair and the French New Wave

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5 According to the 2008 survey conducted by the Korean Film Council (KOFIC), men between the ages of 24 and 29 and women between the ages of 19 and 23 are the “heavy user” groups (kogwanyō chiptan) of film. These figures reflect roughly the ages of men and women in college as it takes longer for men to graduate because of their over two-year mandatory military service.

6 Keathley cites an example of a Dr. Irving Schneider who wrote to Andrew Sarris of The Village Voice to provide an accurate definition of mise-en-scène (11-12).

7 In Breathless (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960), Patricia (Jean Seberg), a journalism student from America, sells the New York Herald Tribune on the streets of Paris.
more often during the ten months of field research than in my seven years of graduate work in the U.S.

With the caveat that I describe young cinephiles in their twenties mostly based on the age of the club members, I lay out below that they are, in general, studious or serious as cinephiles; have cosmopolitan tastes in film; and are neoliberal subjects. The description, however, might not apply equally to every individual in the club while the same description would likely apply to many older film buffs outside the club. I ask the reader to take into account that a degree of generalization was necessary and that I use typical and salient examples. The traits are likewise not self-contained but work in tandem with others. I note, in fact, that I write about the general “structure of feeling” (Williams 1961; 1977) in cinephilia throughout this dissertation while I recognize that that not everyone shares the same ideas about film.

*Studious*

In the film club, I met cinephiles whose command of film language is far better than my own and to whose encyclopedic knowledge of international films I could not hold a candle. The club, in a way, is a para-academy in which they hold what they call “study” (*sŭt'ŏdi*) meetings, the details of which I discuss more fully in chapter 3. In these meetings, they would learn film language and discuss movies together. It might be helpful to note that the notion of study as used in the club is of an entirely different nature from the typical meaning of study (*kongbu*) in South Korean society (see Park 2007). The goal of their studious labor is mostly self-satisfaction.

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8 The structure of feeling implicates notably “a common set of perceptions and values shared by a particular generation” (Taylor 2010: 670, my italics) and “a social experience that lies somewhere between the articulated and the lived experience of a community” (Lawrence and Karim 2007: 180).

9 See Booth (2010) on the notion of “fandom as academy.”
rather than self-management, the latter which is most often a means of upward social mobility (see Abelmann, Park, and Kim 2009).

The club members, in fact, speak of how fun and productive it is to study as they do. Many join the club because they expect to learn a great deal as members. A few even have chosen the university partly in order to join the club that is known as one of the more hardcore film clubs. Haejin, a second year female student, for instance, is one of the members who joined the club because she “wanted to study film more systematically.” In an interview, Haejin told me that she began going to art houses when she moved to Seoul to attend the university. With a newly developed interest in film, she decided to try the club after reading about it online. The rest of the members, like Haejin, share a degree of seriousness when it comes to film. I do not, however, mean to illustrate the stereotypical portrait of the geeky fans of the likes of Star Wars or Comic-Con. There is practically nothing to distinguish them (as in the case of other subcultures such as hip hop); they are as apparently ordinary as any other college students on campus.

As in the case of Haejin, living in Seoul—a topic that I take on further below—is quite formative in nurturing studious habits in cinephiles. This, I would say, is due partially to the work of Seoul Art Cinema, a non-profit cinematheque one of whose purposes is to bring film education to the public. While there are a number of ritzier art houses in Seoul, Seoul Art Cinema, which distinguishes itself in part with its notable architecture—an old theater built in 1969—is housed on the top floor of Nagwŏn Arcade, a mega-mall of musical instrument shops in Central Seoul. Although the complex has been remodeled since the cinematheque has moved in, its theater is well-worn with rickety seats and thin walls that let in the noise from the next-door performance. To the cinephiles who commute to Seoul Art Cinema, however, this scene is
the perfect, if a bit inconvenient, backdrop for watching the classics that are the cinematheque’s specialty. It would be, in fact, quite safe to say that film is more than entertainment for those who frequent Seoul Art Cinema. It is, moreover, not uncommon for cinephiles to identify the cinematheque as a school, calling it “a place that made me study film.” Although the dynamics of the film club and the cinematheque are quite different from each other, I found comparable academic rigor when I stayed for the discussions during the Friends Film Festival that the cinematheque hosts each year. To give the reader a glimpse of its school-like atmosphere, I translate below a selection from the “Cine Talk” session on *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (F.W. Murnau, 1927), the same festival screening that Kubo the film critic, a fictional character, visits in the short story that I introduce in the next chapter.

Let’s say that a character in a silent film is thinking about something. What kind of device can one use to express this? In the early days of cinema, filmmakers used the dissolve. Of course, the introduction of sound later brought voice over narration to express interiority. This was difficult with silent movies. In this movie, we see super-imposition when the farmer falls into the hands of the city woman on the marsh. When he returns home, we see dissolves. We also see cuts when he imagines drowning his wife. *Sunrise* uses such visual techniques to express not only the man’s thoughts but also his feelings. [...] Murnau shows the very groundbreaking invention of film by creating new techniques of storytelling. We often forget about such inventions, but this movie makes me feel like I am watching the birthing of cinema itself.

As I had already visited quite a load of Q&A discussions at the Chungmuro and Pusan International Film Festivals in the previous year, I expected the Cine Talk to be more of a casual discussion with the audience. It, however, turned out to be closer to a formal lecture during which Kim Sŏnguk, the programmer, spent an entire hour discussing the work as he crisscrossed his analysis and film history. Indeed, knowledge (the encyclopedic) and understanding (the analytic) seemed to be the two of the most revered of cinephilic virtues in the world of cinephiles that I experienced during fieldwork.

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10 This is quoted from an interview in *Cine21*. http://www.cine21.com/Article/article_view.php?mm=005002003&article_id=55394.
The seriousness of film buffs is, in fact, a hypothesis that I started my fieldwork with. Soon after I arrived in Seoul, I had a rather pleasant experience at a commercial art house chain called Arthouse Momo located inside the Campus Complex—a student union disguised as a stunning architectural spectacle designed by French architect Dominique Perrault\(^{11}\)—of Ewha Womans University. The film I watched on this particular day was *Ahiru to kamo no koinrokkā* (*The Foreign Duck, the Native Duck and God*; Nakamura Yoshihiro, 2007), an intelligent film that plays with ethnic switch, language swap, and a quiet sort of humor. The choice that I made which was perhaps more significant than the movie itself was that I decided to sit in a corner seat in the back row in the hopes of getting a glimpse of something, if anything, about the audience. I was eager to experience firsthand the structure of feeling of the local film culture since the little I knew about the South Korean film scene was from reading news articles between the years of 2005 and 2008. My reward for choosing a corner seat came at the end of the movie. I saw, to my surprise, everyone in his or her seat, apparently strangers to each other, fixated on the screen until the very last word in the credits had rolled. This could not be more contrary to what journalist Darcy Paquet has experienced in South Korean theaters when “[i]n the past the projectionist would often cut off the credits about ten or fifteen seconds after the film ends, and then the ushers would hustle everyone out of the room.”\(^{12}\) Reading the credits is a habit that I acquired from taking an *Introduction to Film* class as a graduate student; and I felt a strange kind of contentment from this imagined affinity with others who also liked to pay their full respects in the theater. This was, regrettably, the last time that I experienced this (it was perhaps the Bob Dylan song that kept us listening). It nonetheless left an indelible imprint on my mind about film

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\(^{11}\) Perrault became world famous for the design of the French National Library.

fans and culture in South Korea (other than that the viewing experience in regular multiplexes are perhaps not very different from anywhere else in the world where there are multiplexes).

Cosmopolitan

Another hypothesis that I began my fieldwork with is that local cinephiles share cosmopolitan tastes in film. Although I met a number of students in the club who refuse to let themselves be influenced by the environment that encourages them to watch classical and canonical films, practically everyone watched film widely from various nations, genres, and styles. Comparable to cosmocrats who are elite consumers with “an acquired taste for cultural artefacts from around the world” (Vertovec and Cohen 2002: 7), their taste in film and knowledge of film culture are perhaps best qualified with the adjective cosmopolitan. According to Ulf Hannerz (1990), the more significant mark of a cosmopolitan than being “footloose, on the move in the world” (240) is, in fact, to have the freedom to be participants in different cultures. Being a cosmopolitan has, moreover, become easier than ever before as communication and media technologies have made practically everyone cosmopolitan in their own living rooms (e.g., Delanty 2000; Frith 2000; Tomlinson 1999; Urry 1995).

Similarly, figures such as Jean-Luc Godard were household names that I encountered time and again during fieldwork. The following note of a supporter of the cinematheque, for example, is typical of many such a narrative of how, in a sense, one comes to have cosmopolitan tastes in film.

A while after I heard about the death of Eric Rohmer, I took out faded booklets from the days of the Seoul Culture School\(^\text{13}\) and leafed through the pages of old film notes that I used to keep. Truffaut once advised the three steps to loving film. Before I ever learned of his advice, however, I discerned the way of loving film through Rohmer’s movies, watching them repeatedly and making it a habit to

\(^{13}\) The former name of Seoul Art Cinema.
write about them. With seventeen of his films in the summer of 2001, [...] I finally encountered the word of passion called “cinephile.” [...] (Yi Sŏnju) 

Rather reminiscent of conversion narratives, the stories of becoming a cinephile carry a near-religious note of conviction and commitment. That cinema is life changing is, in fact, a common tale of cinephiles. As is the case for this writer, film becomes their sacred text and the Cinémathèque Française a site of “pilgrimage.” There is, in this regard, quite a Eurocentric innuendo in the word cinephile (*sinep’i*l) when it is used as a loanword in Korean although I use the term to refer more broadly to film buffs whose taste is not limited to European cinema. French cinema is, of course, not the only element of cosmopolitan cinephilia; it however, plays a significant role in the lives of film buffs. Even if the writer belongs to this numeric minority even among cinephiles, it is people like her who arguably help sustain the milieu of intense love of film in South Korea. I consider the geopolitical significance of watching foreign art films further in chapter 4.

Acquiring and maintaining cosmopolitan tastes in film is, however, not just a matter of individual tastes but is also tied to multiple variables such as economic sensibility and cultural diversity. If, first, there is a justification as to why or how cinephiles expose themselves to global cinemas, it would be that the daily life of the young is inundated with transnational popular culture which, in a sense, renders multiplicity one of the cultural logics of this generation (e.g., Iwabuchi 2004; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005). The rationale for watching foreign movies, likewise, is quite simple for students like Taemin, who had joined the club recently, because foreign movies have already been “sifted” once before they enter South Korea. In other words, foreign movies are imported with a certain degree of expectation for profit. Taemin’s words

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14 http://trafic.tistory.com/entry/시네마테크-지키기-60 회-시네마테크-영화문화의-'미래'

15 Cineaste is another word for cinephiles, but I use the latter as it is used more widely in South Korea.
amount to say that it makes better economic sense to watch movies that are, if possible, tried and true and promise his money’s worth. Taemin, as a new member of the club, did not share the type of devotional cinephilia of film buffs like Yi Sŏnju, but many students I interviewed seemed to have started their journey simply by “watching many movies” not just in terms of number but also style.

I also have found that cinephiles’ demand for “diversity” (tayangsŏng) in film culture, an integral part of cosmopolitan taste, is homologous to the neoliberal consumer logic that prizes consumer choice in South Korea. While South Koreans might be critical of neoliberalism in the government policies that foster privatization and corporate competition and thereby increase the burden of self-care across the middle and lower classes, the logic of choice, which is no less a neoliberal instrument, seems to have become common sense among them. While I do not argue that all cinephiles embrace neoliberalism consciously and actively, the demand of cinephiles for more diverse choice at the theater in the name of cultural diversity is at least is homologous to the familiar neoliberal discourse promoted by the Lee government. (In this vein, I will discuss the audience campaign to save Seoul Art Cinema in chapter 5). Important to remember, however, is that it is not neoliberalism in and of itself that encourages cinephiles to seek more choice; it rather is more likely to be a contingency that expedites and sometimes encourages their demand for choice in film regardless of the national brand. Whether by a life-changing encounter or by an economic logic, therefore, the taste of young cinephiles is hardly provincial.

Neoliberal

The dictates of neoliberalism, however implicating it is for the culture of film diversity, weigh far greater in the daily reality of the generation of the age cohort of the film club members
who have spent their childhood and adolescence in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Cosmopolitan tastes in film, in other words, are not tantamount to these cinephiles’ subjectivity. It would be wrong to misrepresent the club members or cinephiles in general as full-fledged cosmopolitans who are “at home in the wider world” (Latham 2006: 94). If they bear cosmopolitan characteristics, they do so in so far as they are “fragile” cosmopolitans (see Abelmann and Cho, forthcoming) who must face daily the burden of living in South Korea where the dictates of the neoliberal social order has intensified individual competition in the job market and the need for self-management due to the decreased state support in all areas of life (see Abelmann, Park, and Kim 2009; Song 2009). A particularly poignant practice among the vast majority of South Korean young adults is to build so-called “specs” (sŭp’ek), which is a shorthand for “specifications,” meaning a résumé of acquired skills and experiences for employment. The idea of securing a job simply with a diploma from a reputable university is also a thing of the distant past. The film avocation of the club members, in contrast, is no more than cultural capital that does little to build their competitiveness in the job market. The students are, in this sense, not “at home,” even at home.

The enterprising and proactive hat that young adults who accumulate specs wear is cut from the same cloth as the pressure of social demands. The following entry left on the club’s online forum during an exam period in spring 2008 reflects how stressed university students are. The anonymous writer (whose identity I could figure out based on the content) recalls a street

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16 Latham adds that a cosmopolitan is someone who is at home in the (ethnically) diverse metropolitan city (95).

17 See Harvey (2005) for more on the history of neoliberalism.

18 Building specs is something that the most university students are inclined to do although there is doubt as to whether specs are actually useful in the job market or at the workplace.
performance (i.e., reference to the cardboard box in the entry) he and a few other club members filmed on campus.

“Exam Period”

GPAGPAGPA
When I see myself studying for my GPA
I feel like I am breaking into pieces
Going crazy in that cardboard box
I felt alive at least

To earn money
Like a desirable member of society
I am working my butt off
Shut up in the library
It’s neoliberalism

The writer most likely wrote this on a whim; but it nonetheless reveals how weary he is, longing for the liberating sensation that he and his friends enjoyed with their wild antics\(^\text{19}\) on campus. In this sense, he is one of the many South Koreans who express discontent over the neoliberal changes that took place since the 1990s but without actually working against this repressive system. The safest bet for him after all would be to study hard and get a secure job after graduation for it is not as if it is easy to find an alternative way that bypasses competition in the society. Being one’s own employer is not entirely free from competition either in a country where a sizable portion of the population is entrepreneurs. Tackling the problem at its structure, such as labor policies, is also more easily said than done. The general consensus of the club members was, in fact, that they were quite pessimistic about both the efficiency and ethics of so-called activism. The view was quite consistent whether they had no experience in activism or had participated heavily in street demonstrations against the Lee government.

The fragile condition in which the writer displays himself during the exam period interests me, nonetheless, because he knows the root of his fragility. In the last line of his entry,

\(^{19}\) I recall that they were at least partially nude under the cardboard box.
he names neoliberalism as the culprit. One thing that is worth noting about this, in fact, is that he seems to understand neoliberalism as the direct structural cause of his oppression rather than lauding the liberal ideals promoted by the neoliberal regime. This, apparently, was not the case even a few years ago when Abelmann, Park and Kim (2009) talked to South Korean college students in the summers between 2003 and 2005. In their article, they observe the irony that university students are “blind to their structural differences and positions” as they welcome readily the discourse of self-development in the pursuit of leading a “vital” life (242). The article further notes that South Koreans celebrate inadvertently the “liberal” ideals because of the inopportune historical conjuncture at which the country has only recently democratized and remembers well the authoritarian military dictatorships of the postwar era. To go back to the writer of the online entry, the nature of his fragility is, in this sense, sadder because he is well aware of the fact that he himself made the choice to compromise with reality.

I came across one the most incisive instances of their outlook when I talked to Shinu, a third year male student in the club. Shinu, whose dream was to become a film director before going to the army, returned with an altered plan to apply for bank jobs. In the military, he came to a realization that the hierarchical structure of the army is a mere reflection of the society. It was ultimately as simple a matter as trying not to end up at the relative bottom of the society for him. One enters the film industry, he said, for one’s dream, not money. His last words that rang sadly were, “I guess my dream wasn’t as big.” What is ironic is that Shinu became only “realistic” after serving in the military whereas South Koreans often say that a man becomes a “real man” only once he goes to the military. U Sŏkhun and Pak Kwŏnil (2007) have described the dire situation in reference to Battle Royale (Fukasaku Kinji, 2000), a Japanese film based on
a novel by Takami Kōshun (1994). The synopsis of the film is quite a simple one in which a group of ninth graders are given three days in a game of manslaughter on a deserted island until only one remains alive. The alternative proposed by the Japanese government—a slice of reality in the film version—is death for all. For South Korean youth, that life is a game of survival is similarly the “new nomos of modernity” (Neyrat 2006: 100), a self-evident truth.

**Seoul as a cinephilic city**

If “space is a practiced place” (Certeau 1984: 117), one of the ways to consider the urban landscape of Seoul, though less conventional, would be to look at it as a cinephilic space. There are, to be sure, a good number of important ways to describe the cityscape along classed, gendered, generational, and religious lines among others (see Nelson 2000: 33-68). When it comes to movies, however, Seoul is a cinephilic city, a haven for cinephiles. The individual level of satisfaction must naturally vary from person to person. Theaters, in addition, have been under constant threat especially after the Lee administration came into office, a topic of interest in chapter 5. On a relative scale, however, living in Seoul is on a par with having an international film festival every day of the year as I discuss below. The topography of Seoul as such, I would suggest, makes the city responsible at least in part for nurturing cosmopolitan tastes in cinephiles.

That Seoul is a great place to watch movies especially because of the wide selection of foreign films is an impression that I personally had immediately after I arrived in Seoul for fieldwork. It was, however, not at all difficult to find club members who shared the same

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20 The novel has also been adapted into a *manga* series (2002-6).
reactions. Those who moved to attend the university in Seoul, in particular, spoke of the difficulties of watching movies in regional cities. I already have introduced Haejin, a first year student from Ch’ŏngju, who began visiting art houses in Seoul. According to Haejin, even the ones that play at any old multiplex in Seoul occasionally do not get to her hometown in North Ch’ungch’ŏng Province. Juhee, a native of Pusan, the home to the largest international film festival in Asia (PIFF), remarked that it was hard for her to visit Pusan’s cinematheque as much as she wanted to because there was only one bus that went by the place.

Those who have lived in Seoul, on the other hand, talked about how they found it unnecessary to go to regional cities for their international film festivals. Festivals such as the PIFF and the JIFF (Jeonju) for sure have had a hand in shaping the contours of local cinephilia since the late 1990s and early 2000s (see Iordanova and Cheung 2011; Kim S. 2005; Park, forthcoming). At such festivals, film fans also get to see celebrated filmmakers discuss their works in person. According to the club members, however, a lot of them would go, if they do, mostly for the fun of it—drinking, enjoying the festival atmosphere, and watching random movies (popular selections at these festivals become sold out online literally in matter of seconds). Sangjin, who had gone once with a more serious intent of watching movies, said likewise that he decided not to care too much about film festivals after going to Pusan in his freshman year because not all of the festival selections were worth watching. These festivals, after all, mean sacrifice of time and money for university students taking classes during the school year. Also in the case of the PIFF, a South Korean sound director who wishes to remain anonymous advised me in an interview that, for lay visitors, the festival has lost the excitement

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21 The romanization of the festival title since has changed to Busan International Film Festival.
of the early years due to the increasing commercialization. The words of my informants as such point singularly to the spatial significance of Seoul in the lives of ordinary cinephiles.

Besides, Seoul itself is the home of numerous major and minor film festivals ranging from international in scale to political in theme, a point also shared by the club members. Art houses in Seoul, moreover, can stand in for regional film festivals to a certain extent as it often is the case that they include recent festival favorites in their already diverse programs. The discussion sessions at many of these art houses are also worth going to as I have described above although it is less likely for them to host foreign filmmakers at these venues. What I found perhaps more interesting than what goes on at art houses is that vendors of apparently illegal DVD copies sell classics and art films in addition to a larger assortment of blockbusters at nearby subway stations. My eyes turned to one of these tables one day when I thought I caught the sight of the cover of *Au Revoir Les Enfants* (Louis Malle, 1987), a movie that I lately had been thinking about watching at an art house. From this day on, I occasionally stopped by at these street vendors and found, interestingly enough, that their selections roughly followed the latest programs of art houses.

That there are vendors who sell illegal copies of foreign art films in the subway stations of Seoul might be a fragment of how just about everything from population to popular culture is concentrated in the capital city in South Korea. It is also true that the country is quite preoccupied with “globalizing” local culture and cityscape that it is not quite out of place to see such a diverse array of foreign films in the city. That Seoul has a cosmopolitan film culture, however, is worth giving a thought to because South Korea is equally known for its film and media nationalism. The nationalist sensibilities are quite pervasive to the extent that, for instance, so-called idol bands who are often the object of
cyber bullying by (most likely) teenagers are conversely admired when their albums or television dramas do well overseas all for the sake of “making the name of the nation honorable abroad” (kugwi sŏnyang). To name the phenomenon, it would be hallyu (Korean wave) nationalism that has been at the center of South Korean popular cultural discourse for many years now. I discuss in the following, in this regard, how the success of national cinema and the hallyu contributed if partially to the dialectical process of making the city known for its diverse filmic repertoires.

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In recent years, much has been written on the love of Korean popular culture that swept across in huge waves well beyond the Asian continent (see Park 2010; Sung 2010; Yin 2005). The middle-aged Japanese women smitten by Yon-sama in Winter Sonata (KBS, 22 2002) are now a classic example of the hallyu. These women, not surprisingly, consume South Korean popular culture not only in Japan but also in the country of their stars, propelling so-called hallyu tourism. It is, moreover, not uncommon for young Korean pop idols to make their ways to other parts of the world with markedly greater success than on their home turf. South Korean popular culture, in fact, has been so thriving in Asia that it has brewed not only anti-hallyu but also anti-Korean sentiments at the same time. The hallyu as such is now such an established cultural phenomenon that it has even experienced a revival, so-called the neo-hallyu, with the generation change in hallyu hotspots such as Japan.

Cinema, which has been a comparatively minor player in the hallyu movement, is not without its success stories. One of the forerunners that won the hearts of young Asians in the neighboring countries is without a doubt My Sassy Girl (Kwak Jae-yong, 2001). In Hong Kong,

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22 Korean Broadcasting System.
this landmark romantic comedy grossed a record HK$10 million (USD1.3 million) while an estimate of a ten million pirated DVD copies were sold in China where film imports are strictly regulated (Paquet 2009: 103). Its phenomenal success coupled with the original storyline based on an Internet novel has inspired at least four foreign remakes or adaptation to date including three feature films made in the U.S., India and the Philippines in addition to a television drama (dorama) series broadcasted in Japan all in 2008. While none of the remakes quite lived up to the reputation of the original, the enthusiasm for South Korean cinema in foreign film markets seems ample. It was in fact only a matter of time for South Korean genre movies ranging from romantic comedies to “extreme” cult films to gain currency overseas, quite significantly, outside of the festival circuit.

Thanks to the DVD labels such as the United Kingdom-based Tartan Asian Extreme, ordinary film fans met a “new” player in the global film market (see Shin 2009).

I place an emphasis on the word new because, in terms of film, the rise of the Korean Wave went hand in hand with the development of the New Korean Cinema—not to be confused with the Korean New Wave as to be discussed below—that gained momentum in the late 1990s. In other words, the hallyu in cinema was possible because Ch’ungmuro, the mainstream South Korean film district, began producing exportable films. The New Korean Cinema, on the one hand, can be seen as a part of the larger renaissance of Korean cinema that began with the Korean New Wave movement of the 1980s and early 1990s (see Choi 2010). The New Wave films, however, only “served to alienate many ordinary viewers” owing to their “formal experimentation and political orientation” (Paquet 2009: 60). It is indeed an irony as the films were “ostensibly made for the minjung” (60), a term that refers in practice to the marginalized

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23 My Sassy Girl (Yann Samuell, US); Ugly Aur Pagli (Sachin Khot, India); My Amnesia Girl (Cathy Garcia-Molina, Philippines); and Ryokiteki na Kanojo (Tokyo Broadcasting System, Japan).

24 For more on various genres in South Korean cinema, see Choi (2010).
working class in the industrial and agricultural sectors (see Abelmann 1996; Lee 2007a; Wells 1995). The New Korean Cinema, in this particular regard, signaled a clear rupture from the New Wave. The New Korean Cinema, which a new generation of young directors including a large number of recent film school graduates produced, became diversified from top to bottom in terms of subject matter, style, genre, and scale (Paquet 2009: 3; see Choi 2010). Directed by cinephiles themselves, moreover, the genealogy of these films reaches far beyond Korean cinema and includes a wide variety of films from European and Taiwanese art films to Hollywood B-movies (65-6). The New Korean Cinema, no longer catering to an imagined group of audience with an esoteric if not parochial approach to filmmaking, became popular especially among young spectators and therefore exportable.

Although the term New Korean Cinema appears to be a label coined abroad and is not quite in currency in South Korea (Cine21 4 Jan 2007), most South Koreans would point to the release of Swiri (Kang Je-Kyu, 1999) as the most important watershed in the new developments. Swiri became a sensation when its domestic box-office sales broke the wall of a million for the first time in South Korea. The popularity of the movie, however, did not owe simply to its spectacular action scenes or the tragic melodrama of an ill-fated relationship between the secret agents of the two Koreas. Practically the entire country was stirred up when the box-office sales surpassed those of Titanic (James Cameron, 1997), which was released locally just a few months before in 1998. It was indeed a rare triumph as the formidable record of Titanic at the global

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26 The masterpieces of Kim Ki-young (1919-1998) are the most notable examples of influence among Korean films in the genealogy of New Korean Cinema.

27 Anon., What should we call today’s Korean cinema? [Onûlnal ŭi Han’guku yŏngghwa nŭn muŏsûro bullŏya hanŭn’ga], Cine21, 4 Jan 2007.
box-office was not to be broken in a decade’s time until the release of Cameron’s own *Avatar* (2009). The success of a homegrown film must have been felt quite keenly as the country as a whole went through the Asian financial crisis of 1997 that affected not only the working and middle classes but also the *chaebŏl*, the giant conglomerates largely under the aegis of government protection (they also had a big stake in the film industry). For many ordinary viewers who professed to have left the theater in tears, deeply moved, it made sense to support such an outstanding piece of work for the sake of one’s country.

In spite of being clearly Hollywood in style (see Kim K.: 2002), *Swiri* turned out to be not only a filial film, a national pride, but also a fraternal piece as well. Its commercial success, in other words, appears to have had a hand in reviving film industry by encouraging the investors on the lookout for a new market.\(^{28}\) The average production cost of a South Korean film, for example, doubled in five years from 1999 to 2003 with the number of productions rising into the 2000s (see Table 1). Policymakers, in addition, showered cultural industries an unprecedented level of support under the Kim Dae-jung government (1998-2003). It was, moreover, precisely the new talents who benefited from the surge of capital and support into the industry. In 2002, a “typical year” according to Darcy Paquet, for instance, “of 59 major theatrical releases, 31 or 53% were by debut directors” (68). The growth of the New Korean Cinema in both number and content has, in turn, resulted in a skyrocketing number of exports to the extent that the export figure came to exceed the annual production by threefold in 2008, suggesting an interest in Korean films produced prior to the export year itself in foreign film markets.

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\(^{28}\) New investors emerged, most notably the food conglomerates CJ Corporation (CJ Entertainment and CGV multiplexes) and Orion Group (Showbox and Megabox multiplexes), to keep one jump ahead in the industry where the previous *chaebŏl* capital had withdrawn around the IMF crisis in 1997.
Table 1: Average Cost of Production & Annual Export Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Production cost*</th>
<th>Marketing cost</th>
<th>Total cost</th>
<th>Number of production</th>
<th>Total annual production cost**</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Films</th>
<th>Price per Film (USD)</th>
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<td>20.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3,401.30</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>354</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>124</td>
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<td>2007</td>
<td>321</td>
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<td>14.4</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>110</td>
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<td>2006</td>
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*a hundred million won.

**approx.

Ch’ungmuro, to be fair, began breaking out of slump\(^{31}\) beginning in the early 1990s, most notably with the emergence of new producers who experimented with so-called “planned films” that target audience groups identified largely by age or sex based on market research (see Shin C. 2005: 215; Shin J. 2005: 41-2). One such production company is Shin Cine Communications established by Shin Chul who also served as one of the “planners” of \textit{Happiness Does Not Come in Grades} (Kang Woo-suk, 1989), which is credited as the earliest planned film of this period (See Yun 2010: 28-31). Shin Cine Communications is, in fact, responsible for producing later commercial hits such as \textit{The Letter} (Lee Jung-gook, 1997) and \textit{The Contact} (Chang Yoon-hyun, \footnote{The data retrieved from the Korean Film Council (\url{http://www.kofic.or.kr/cms/623.do}). }

\footnote{Ibid (\url{http://www.kofic.or.kr/cms/626.do}).}

\footnote{In addition to the declining popularity of the Korean New Wave, the slump in the film industry since the 1980s has always involved Hollywood and led to a number of activisms, one of the latest of which is what Judy Han aptly calls “film-farm solidarity” against the U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement decisions over screen quota and rice. \url{http://www.judyhan.com/otherwise/?p=221}}
1997) that brought new melodramatic and romance narratives to South Korean cinema as well as *My Sassy Girl* (Kwak Jae-yong, 2001) through which *hallyu* in South Korean cinema gained momentum. Shin Cine Communications also established South Korea’s first computer graphics company in 1993 (Yun 2010: 29); and the company’s films helped build a special effects industry that ranked among the Asia's strongest by 2001 (Shin J. 2005: 40). Whereas the producer system waned into the mid 2000s when young filmmakers as well as actors backed up by new talent management systems became central in the industry, producers such as Shin played a significant part in reviving South Korean cinema (Yun 2010: 29).

*Swiri*, moreover, did not revive the industry single-handedly into the 2000s. The momentum created by the national project of watching *Swiri* was sustained through subsequent blockbusters such as *Joint Security Area* (Park Chan-wook, 2000) and *Friend* (Kwak Kyung-taek, 2001), both powerful narratives of troubled male bonding that led the way of the “remasculization” of South Korean cinema (see Kim 2004). The film, nonetheless, has arguably furnished a model for collective cinephilia for South Koreans, making domestic cinema a shared cultural experience, knowledge, and object of patriotic pride. The market share of domestic titles, in fact, reached an astonishing 75.9% at one point (*Cine21* 8 Nov 2005), and, by 2005, South Korea became the fifth largest film market in the world (see Paquet 2009: 72; Choi 2010: 2). The New Korean Cinema as such was a process rather than an event that involved a variety of players beyond the filmmakers themselves.

On the other side of the excitement, however, was a growing concern for the structural conditions that led precisely to such developments. In short, domestic films could outperform Hollywood thanks in particular to the vertically integrated film industry in which a few *chaebol* companies control all rights to films not only as majority investors but also as distributors with
brand multiplexes (see Paquet 2009: 56; 101-2). According to Paquet, the vertically integrated industry model signifies an impairment of the industry as a whole as follows.

Of a nationwide total of 1,100 screens, Silmido was released on 325 screens (30%) and Tae Guk Gi on a record 430 (39%). Smaller films that had been released at the same time found themselves pushed out of theatres even if they were performing well. The Screen Quota proved to be of no help to small-scale releases, as theatres could simply fulfill their quota obligations by slotting in high grossing Korean blockbusters. (102)

The new distribution system of nationwide release ultimately punished art, independent, and other low-budget films in favor of high-grossing blockbusters. Had more screens been allocated to less profitable films, the box-office performance of popular titles would not have been as high. The success of national cinema, in this way, meant not only economic harm to the filmmakers and producers in the margins but also inequity and lack of diversity in film culture, a topic that I take on again in chapter 5. The rise of the New Korean Cinema made it appear as though it gave the audience more choice of quality movies at the theater; the reality, however, was that the very choice had already been made for by the major distributors.

Artplus Cinema Network (hereafter, Artplus), a significant part in the cinephilic landscape of Seoul, was born out of such concerns. As a nationwide network of theaters formed to bring diversity to film culture, the consortium began with two theaters with the support of the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) in 2002. The occasion, according to its website, rose when four particular titles—Waikiki Brothers (Lim Sun-rye, 2001), Ray-Ban (Jang Hyun-soo, 2000), The Butterfly (Moon Seung-wook, 2001), and Take Care of My Cat (Jeong Jae-eun, 2001)—were prematurely removed from screens as they fell behind at the box-office in 2001. This was the year when optimism grew with the steady performance of domestic films especially as Friend gained an enormous popularity nationwide as well as among the Korean diaspora. In the winter

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32 The Network earned, for example, the financial assistance of KOFIC in the form of low-interest loans up to 15 billion Korean won in addition to the reimbursement of an average of 6.5% of the ticket proceeds (Maeil Business News 6 Aug 2002).
of 2001, however, the audience who wished to keep the screens for the four films led the movement to success, extending or obtaining screens by going to theaters to watch the films (Cine21 28 Aug 2007). The news media called it a “wanarago” movement, taking each syllable from the first letter of each title in Korean.

While the market share of non-mainstream films remains relatively low, the number of participating theaters in the network has multiplied in the past eight years. Out of the twenty three theaters under the umbrella of Artplus, eleven theaters with fourteen screens (mostly in art houses) dedicated to non-mainstream films are located in Seoul as of 2011. In numeric terms, one may, in theory, come across an art or independent film in about every 17 square miles in the city as the total area of Seoul is 233.69 square miles with the estimated radius of 9.32 miles. The total number of all movie theaters, moreover, amounts to seventy five as of 2011 in metropolitan Seoul, dotting the map with a theater every 3.1 square miles on an average. While it is true that the crowded city has too many of everything from coffee shops to doctor’s offices, theaters do not quite fit the category of small business with which many South Koreans have achieved self-made middle class status. To borrow Chris Berry’s words, the city furnishes its locals with “full service cinema” (2002). Berry’s description, to note, is not of the exhibition sector but of the production side whose diverse range of films has helped expand the export market. The term, however, seems no less appropriate for describing the wider variety of choices offered to film fans in Seoul.

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33 The national average admissions rate in 2010, for example, recorded 9.9% of the total number of seats at art houses as opposed to 30% of seats at multiplexes (Kungmin Ilbo 6 Oct 2010).


Fieldwork

In the fall semester of 2008, I began the core of my fieldwork in a film club that I will call Cinepol at a university in Seoul. I acted as a member beyond my capacity as a researcher with the goal of being a real person in the club and an “observant participator” (See Wacquant 2010; Schmuck 2006: 50-51). I collected group and individual discourses in settings ranging from administrative meetings to small talks. The most central activity of the club is the weekly group study meetings in which the members take turns giving presentations and leading discussions on films or topics of their choice. The number of weekly meetings I participated in added up to twenty one by the end of my fieldwork. Though I was never in charge of a meeting, I participated fully in the discussions while taking detailed notes. In addition to the formal group meetings, I joined other activities such as dinners and membership training (MT in Korean), field notes of which I also kept each day as a journal.

In the club, I joined another small group that a few students had formed to study film theories. This group included two members from film clubs at other universities; and a student with no film club affiliation from another university who joined the group towards the end of my fieldwork. We spent a total of fourteen weeks over the span of two academic semesters to read and discuss three books: Film theory (Lapsley and Westlake 1998); Questions of cinema (Heath 1981); and Enjoy your symptom! (Žižek 2001). All texts we used were translated in Korean with the exception of the last chapter of Žižek we read in English that had not been translated from the second edition. Each week, we, including myself, took turns preparing discussion papers on corresponding chapters from the book. We also spent additional eight weeks, in the course of the same semesters, to discuss films either with or without papers we had written for school
(although none of the students majored in film studies). While I took detailed notes during all meetings, I recorded and transcribed three of the film discussions. With the help of one of the students from another university, moreover, I visited one of their weekly meetings, which I found to be similar to the study meetings in Cinepol.

In addition to my observant participation, I conducted semi-formal interviews with fourteen students in the second semester when I got to know the members more intimately. One of the interviews was a group interview with two members participating; and one member opted for an e-mail correspondence. I recorded and transcribed all of the oral interviews which lasted from an hour to two hours. In all, I spent ten months (two academic semesters) in the club with a total of thirty seven students, a portion of who were visitors or new members, participating in my research.

In addition, I visited an editorial board meeting of *Pilsa*, a non-profit film magazine produced by university students and young professionals in Seoul. With the help of a co-editor in chief, I collected what is available of the archived materials. I introduce a feature from the magazine in the next chapter. Last but not least, I participated in three major international film festivals in Chungmuro (Seoul), Pusan, and Jeonju; three minor international film festivals in Seoul (International Woman's Film Festival in Seoul, Green Film Festival in Seoul, and Friends Film Festival); and two intercollegiate film festivals in Seoul through which I have collected two student films in addition to five others that I received from the club members. I discuss two films from a student festival (in order to protect the identity of the club) in chapter 3. Aside from

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*The full title of the magazine is *P’ililum e kwanhan tchalbun sarang*, which the magazine staff also have translated as *A Short Love for Film*. The magazine borrows its title from a 1988 Polish film, *Krótki film o milosći (A Short Film about Love)*, directed by Krzysztof Kieslowski.*
the ethnographic sites, I use news media, film journalism, and audience discourses to situate the age cohorts who are the focus of my dissertation in a larger cultural context.

Overview

I start this dissertation with a literary portrait of cinephiles published in *Pilsa*. Chapter 1, “A Vignette: *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic*,” offers a translation of two installments from a serial (Jan-Mar 2009) of short stories under the title of *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic* (P’yŏngnon’ga Kubo-ssi ŭi iril). I follow my translation with an analysis of the intertextuality in this fan adaptation of the works written by Pak T’aewŏn (1934) and Ch’oe Inhun (1969-1972). I consider this rendition as a fictional portrait of the cinephiles in this dissertation: academically driven and fluent in visual or cinematic language. In Chapter 2, “Cinema as Everyday Practice: A College Film Club,” I introduce the setting of Cinepol, the film club at a university in Seoul where I participated as a member-researcher. In the first half of the chapter, I discuss the multifaceted beginnings of college film clubs that began as student movement groups (*undongkwŏn*) in the early 1980s. In the second half, I turn the clock forward to discuss how technology has influenced local cinephiles today. I suggest that the Internet has brought film to the most intimate space for this generation—the PC—and as such made it an everyday practice. It is with such personal film libraries on the Internet that cinephiles accumulate massive knowledge of world cinemas and acquire cosmopolitan tastes.

Chapter 3, “The Bordwell Regime: ‘A Different Kind of Fun’” introduces the most central activity of Cinepol, which the members call the “structural analysis” (*kujojuŭijŏk punsŏk*) of film. Not to be confused with Althusserian-type structural criticism, the club members strictly
police their talk and writings about film to be primarily about film’s formal qualities. They acquire the necessary cineliteracy through *Film Art*, a textbook written by the American film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. This chapter ultimately grapples with what some would consider the “soft power” (see Frazer 2003; Nye 1990, 2004) of Western film scholarship and contemplates where the ownership of theory lies by examining the club members’ discourse of pleasure in structural analysis. Chapter 4, “Affective Cinephilia: The ‘Taste’ and ‘Feeling’ of Film,” in addition, considers the cultural significance of the cosmopolitan tastes of the club members in light of the postcolonial criticism of South Korean cinephilia by film scholar Kim Soyoung (2000). On the one hand, I recognize the presence of the postcolonial habitus in which viewers watch art films as relics of Western modernity. I illustrate this case in point with the examples from my own encounters with those who watch French films in Seoul. On the other hand, however, based on an analysis of the talk of the club members about film itself, I suggest that the pursuit of modernity is arguably the least of the interests of the cinephiles. In specific, I argue that the club members’ use of the language of affect such as “taste” and “feeling” reveals their film-centered values not affected by postcolonial sensibilities.

I close this dissertation with Chapter 5, “Local Cinephiles, Cosmopolitan Cinephilia,” which discusses the social and economic aspects of cosmopolitan cinephilia, considering cinephiles not only as movie lovers as in Chapters 3 and 4, but also as consumers. In specific, I turn to the concept of diversity (*tayangsoŋ*), a word that is closely related to cosmopolitan tastes. I argue that diversity has a dual significance as a cultural ideal and consumer rights to choice. I examine the case of the crisis of the Seoul Art Cinema as an example of how the double meaning of diversity plays out in the discourse of the audience. Tracing the development of an audience
campaign to save and support the cinemathque against the Lee administration, I suggest furthermore that neoliberal values coupled with the cultural importance of diversity at the grassroots level challenge the official doctrine of the government that works tirelessly to guard the free market economy.
PART I
TIMING COSMOPOLITAN CINEPHILIA

In chapters one and two, I present temporal vignettes of cosmopolitan cinephilia: a fictional portrait of today’s cinephiles (chapter 1) and a historical observation on how cinephilia among college students has changed from the 1980s to the 2000s (chapter 2).

In chapter 1, the short stories provide a *synchronic* view of contemporary cinephilia as the narrative of Kubo the film critic highlights the studious, cosmopolitan, and neoliberal nature of the culture of cinephiles, situating them in the contemporary social context of South Korea. In chapter 2, I provide a *diachronic* view of the major historical contexts in which university film clubs have operated. Specifically, I introduce the young cinephiles of the 1980s who used so-called “small cinema” to challenge the authorities of the military regime and 35mm commercial film as well as today’s “techno-subjects” (see Hayles 2002) who depend greatly on the Internet technology for their movie needs.
Chapter One

A Vignette: A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic

(P’yŏngnon’ga Kubo-ssi Ûi iril)\(^{37}\)

The reader who is acquainted with Korean literature will recognize the familiar name of Kubo—the novelist—in the title of the serial of short stories I introduce in this chapter. \textit{A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic} (2009; hereafter, \textit{Kubo the Film Critic}) is an adaptation of two particular versions of \textit{A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist} (1934, 1969-1972; hereafter, \textit{Kubo the Novelist}), a modernist classic written first during the colonial period (1910-1945) and has been adapted many times since in literary and other genres. \textit{Kubo the Film Critic} is a feature in \textit{Pilsa}, a non-profit film magazine published by university students and young professionals in Seoul. I present two episodes from the series as a literary vignette that encapsulates the structure of feeling (Williams 1961) of the culture of young cinephiles in Seoul. As a caricature, the stories will highlight the traits of cinephiles that I have offered in the introduction: studious, cosmopolitan, and neoliberal. The reader, moreover, will see above all the centrality of film in the daily lives of cinephiles who are familiar with film classics, film scholarship, and film language.

In the original novella written by Pak T’aewŏn (1934), the day in the life of Kubo the novelist is a series of mundane encounters that span the time between when he leaves home after his breakfast and when he returns home in the early hours of the morning after walking around Kyŏngsŏng—old Seoul—all day long. An intellectual who has studied abroad in Tokyo, he is,

\(^{37}\) All translations are mine. An earlier version of this chapter is forthcoming in \textit{Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature & Culture}. 
however, a grown-up\textsuperscript{38} son to his mother who has not been able to procure a job or a wife, a source of worry and bewilderment for her. Kubo the film critic is likewise a ne’er-do-well in his own right. Comically reminiscent of the superfluous\textsuperscript{39} intellectual of the colonial period, the disenfranchised film critic walks on a tightrope, unable to land a stable job even with his foreign degree in film studies. Among the many adaptations of the original, Ch’oe Inhun’s (1969-1972) version of the novel is also outstanding for its references in \textit{Kubo the Film Critic}. Published under the same title as a newspaper serial, Ch’oe’s novel narrates a series of days (rather than a single day) of Kubo the novelist, an intellectual of the postwar South Korea under military dictatorship.

In my discussion of the intertextuality of the texts, I first demonstrate how \textit{Kubo the Film Critic} comments on the college realities of South Korea as the originals do on the social and historical circumstances of the colonial and postwar Koreas. Here, I suggest that the film critic, though probably older in age, is an alter ego—or shadow—of young cinephiles who are precarious neoliberal subjects whose cosmopolitan tastes and knowledge in film do not necessarily translate into economic promise. In the second part of my analysis, I follow with an examination of the writing style and literary technique in \textit{Kubo the Film Critic}. I consider, first, the use of psychoanalysis as a narrative device in \textit{Kubo the Film Critic} that offers a commentary on the pedantic culture of cinephiles. I address, next, how the adaptation points to a generation that is fluent in visual or film language in its transformation of a writerly passage of the original into a cinematic one. In the fan adaptation, in short, the reader can experience cinematic vision

\textsuperscript{38} In the 1934 novella, Kubo is 26 years old.

\textsuperscript{39} I use the term “superfluous man” not only to invoke the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Russian literary concept but also to allude to the colonial period literary (anti-)heroes (especially protagonists who are intellectuals) who largely fit into this category. For more discussion of the term, see Gheith (2004: 129-155).
and time especially through an effect of seeing from the camera’s point of view that is largely lacking in the original text. I resume the portrait of cinephiles who are scholarly and fluent in film language—in real life—in chapter 3.

In my translation, I have made every effort to preserve the format and style of the original text because they lend significantly to the tone and spirit of the narrative (see Benjamin 1968). The more faithful translation of cryptic words and run-on sentences, for instance, reflect the deliberate difficulty of the stories in the original language. Wherever applicable, I have glossed my choices in translation in the footnotes. The following is the first two episodes in the unfinished three-part series published from January to March of 2009.40

A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic (評論家)41

Written by An Sŏngyong (former staff writer)42

Episode 1, “Metropolitan ‘Ŏ-bu-ŏ-bu’”

As the year 2008 drew to a close, on a morning a few days before the end of December, Kubo, a film critic, woke up from his sleep. Aside from the sound of different alarm clocks going off at the same time in three or four households, he felt nostalgic for sounds like those of magpies and temple bells, and the analog sounds that he used to hear in the holiday mornings

40 Volumes 18th to 20th.

41 The author—or the narrator—often adds hanja (Chinese characters) and/or English words in parentheses. I have incorporated this by retaining hanja and replacing the English with romanized transliteration of Korean. I do not, however, indicate whether hanja or English is added next to or substituted entirely for Korean. While I do not expect every reader to recognize hanja cognates, they are meant, in part, to demonstrate their visual impact in the text.

42 This is the name under which the serial was published.
when he stayed at the family house\textsuperscript{43} in the countryside. Kubo, however, asked as he brushed his teeth, “Have I ever lived in the countryside?” and found himself strange for longing for such things since he had lived in the city all his life. Those who live in the city have idealized images of the rural, each of his or her own.\textsuperscript{44} Kubo, too, had his own mental images of rural landscapes that he absorbed from the television. Having heard the magpie’s call for the first time in a \textit{Rural Diary}\textsuperscript{45} episode as a child, he indulged in wishful thinking that a magpie might fly in from a nonexistent hometown. He left home without breakfast and was already lighting a cigarette the moment the number on the elevator changed from 2 to 1. Once the elevator doors opened, he puffed hastily at his cigarette and slipped out of the building. As Kubo walked the twenty steps or so from the elevator to the front entrance of the building, three residents saw him but did not bother to show any interest in his illegal smoking. They say you get your nose chopped off when you do so much as blink in the city, but he thought this urban dreariness to be a plus as long as it did not interfere with his trivial dereliction.

Kubo was an expert in overcoming the indifference of his neighbors through metropolitan optimism. He waited for the bus to Chongno to watch a movie at an early-bird price. Before long, the number 414 bus that passes by Chongno 2-ga arrived. Kubo boarded the bus and was relieved when he spotted an empty seat behind the passengers who lined up to get off. When a high school girl who boarded through the back door cut through the people and landed safely in that seat, however, he could no longer feel so magnanimous. Kubo saw the quorum (定數) of a metropolitan kind in the high school girl who shoved away the passengers on their way out as if

\textsuperscript{43} The “family house” (kŭnjip) refers to the household of one’s eldest agnatic relative.

\textsuperscript{44} The original sentence is gender neutral.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Rural Diary} (Chŏnwŏn ilgi) is the longest running South Korean “drama” dating from October 21, 1980 to December 29, 2002 (broadcasted by MBC).
she were going through some moving boxes while she spoke into the speaker attached to an electronic device oh-so-coquettishly. Could the binary sound (bainōri saundū) synchronized to digital signs be more human than mechanical heaviness (力學的重量感)? Kubo, remembering how he himself had to wake up to the binary signals (二陣信號的) of alarm clocks, was about to critique the dehumanization (沒人格化) of modern subjects but soon realized that he, too, was a lone wolf when he arrived at the conclusion that it is yet another medieval (中世的) paradox (p’aradoksū) to imply anything beyond protein mass to the mechanical heaviness as he sat among the passengers. Kubo was a man who gradually lost friends because he distanced himself too much from using machines. He knew too well that this is the day and age when one cannot have meaningful human relationships without a cellular phone and the Internet, but it was the likes of him who found more pleasure in critiquing such things than in breaking out of solitude. And his thorough professionalism was just about to reveal a new understanding of metropolitan identity from his own sense of isolation. Kubo, not wanting to lose the new ideas that stimulated his scalp as protein compounds agitated in his pituitary gland, got out his notepad and scrawled a few sentences starting with a capital M. He did so, however, only to cross them all out, upon reading how they sounded like a sci-fi cliché. The high school girl who landed in the empty seat next to an old man who snoozed as he rested his head on the window had already hung up the phone and was listening to music through ear buds. She took out a black plastic bag from her backpack and started eating a red bean bun that she must have bought from a convenience store rather than a bakery. Kubo felt sorry for something in the figure of the girl who gorged down the bun without even milk, and he wondered if his attempt to arrive at a new philosophy of the metropolitan through that high school girl was none other than a deformed manifestation of his abject desire to sit in the empty seat. The bus passed by Kwanghwamun in no time at all, and
there was a jet-black giant hammering slowly outside the window on the right side. The iron structure that raised and dropped its right hand all year long like Chaplin in *Modern Times* was wearing a red Santa Claus hat, a gift, maybe, from the landlord of the Cinecube building. Kubo, as he witnessed this capitalistic paternalism, was comforted and thought, “He will spend a warm winter this year!” He found room for generosity in his heart once again, enough to feel an affinity with a machine-man.

At five minutes to ten o’clock, Kubo arrived at Sponge House located in the direction of Ch’ŏnggyech’ŏn at Chongno 2-ga. The winter sun that was yet to rise above the Dusan Tower in Tongdaemun cast a rectangular shadow on the 4-lane road. Kubo scanned the showtimes in considerable discomfort because the cold wind that entered his nostrils filled up his respiratory organs with secretion and that made it hard to breathe.

| Theater 1 | 10:30 | *Romantic Island* |
| Theater 2 | 11:30 | *Waltz with Bashir* |
| Theater 6 | 11:00 | *I Just Didn’t Do It* |

He did not have a particular movie that he wanted to watch and was more interested in secondary facts such as what the theater district looks like or what sort of people come to watch movies early in the morning on a weekday. As he would express openly his contempt for mechanical devices, cinema for Kubo was not an object of appreciation and love but more often an object of criticism and conquest. As a film critic, his philosophy (觀) of cinema dictated that film, too, was a mere mechanical illusion (幻影), and this made him accept his lot as a lone heretic. The problem of whether film is of primary (主) importance and audience secondary (副次), or whether audience is primary and film secondary, in a space that is theater was the very theme of the editorial which he was to contribute to the coming issue of *Kino21*. Kubo
approached a hottŏk stall to observe what was new with moviegoers. The face of the woman who was pressing down the round dough on the hot iron plate lit up as if Kubo was the first customer of the day. His heart warmed up to the woman’s smile that resembled Pokkil’s (福吉) mother, indeed more so than he did to the sizzling cooking oil. The woman appeared to be deaf. Not wishing to make her envy his eloquence by starting a meaningless small talk, he handed a thousand wŏn bill with a silent smile. Kubo turned his head in order to see the box office after receiving his green tea hottŏk. There was not even a single person at the box office, probably because the first movie would not start until thirty minutes later. The sugary hotcake that became thinner with the soaring price of flour did not promise more than a fifteen minutes of savoring even if he could take all the time in the world. After a minute passed as Kubo waited for his hottŏk to cool down, he took a bite as small as one fifteenth and looked around the theater as he gained (得) a sense of satisfaction for his hunger. He reminisced about the good old CineCore because Sponge House did not feel at all like a theater to him. He recalled Myungbo Plaza and Academy Cinema, too. While Kubo was chewing slowly the last one-fifteenth portion, the first audience member appeared. He was a middle-aged man about the age of Kubo. He looked like a laid-off person who left home this morning after telling his wife that he was off to work, than a provincial salary man who was on a business trip to Seoul. He was about to exchange nods with the hotcake seller after blowing his nose vigorously but in next to no time resented her. As he turned his body to throw away the paper that he had held hottŏk with and saw “Green tea hottŏk 700 wŏn,” he realized that his 300 wŏn had been filched. He quickly turned towards the box office feeling, once again, heartless.

“… Which one are you going to watch?”

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46 Pokkil’s mother is a character in Rural Diary.
The box office girl who was as cold as in the days of CineCore pressed him. Kubo, however, could not open his mouth so easily. He thought his nose would explode and fire out the mucus that stuffed his respiratory organ if he did so much as say one word. Against his will, Kubo could do nothing more than mumble, “Ŏ-bu-ŏ-bu,” as he wheezed through his mouth. The box office girl, having seen him hanging about the _hottŏk_ stall without uttering a single word, decided without giving it a thought that he was a deaf and asked,

“*Romantic Island* for 10:30?”

Kubo shook his head vertically on the spot and received his ticket.

The jobless man, the first person in the audience, and Kubo, the second, were the only ones in the theater. Kubo was able to relieve himself and blow his nose during the trailers. It was not that he did not care about the person who sat behind him, but there already grew a sense of camaraderie of a certain kind between them. Kubo, after dropping a bundle of tissues on the floor and wiping around his nose and mouth, realized that he had not spoken a single word that day. He could have talked to the deaf woman ten minutes ago. Before that, if his neighbors were even slightly more ethical, Kubo would have engaged in a petty squabble with them. What if a magpie had really flown in from Yangch’on-*ni* this morning? Kubo would have jerked out a meaningless word of greeting. He felt sorry that he let go of all the chances when he had so many occasions to talk this morning. He thought his sense of remorse would abate a little if Yujin and Yi Suguŏng could console the heart of that jobless man, the first person in the audience, as they strolled down the tropical beach in their bikinis.

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47 The setting of _Rural Diary_.

48 The names of the lead actresses in _Romantic Island_ (Kang Cheol-woo, 2008).
As Kubo looked at the other member of the audience who would not leave his seat in the back row until the credits ended, he thought it would be nice to get a mobile phone from him if he was indeed a phone salesman on a business trip from countryside.

Episode 2, “The Freudian Rings the Bell Twice”

The name “Friends” kept getting on Kubo’s nerves. “Friends” sounded too close to the adnominal phrase (冠形語) “uri.” Kubo was on his way to Insa-dong to meet his high school pal whom he had not seen in a long time and arrived there an hour early, but he decided to make a short stop at Nagwŏn Arcade because he did not want to give an impression to his old friend (知友) that he was a loafer (閑良). The courtyard of Seoul Art Cinema—from where one could get a bird’s-eye-view of the Chongno Tower that stands aloft, looking more like a phallus (p’allusŭ) than a pharos—was bustling as if every cinephile in the country gathered there. Kubo was caught off guard by the unexpectedly large crowd, and only when he turned his head to look for the scientific forecast (豫報) of this unforeseen disaster was he able to discover a poster of Marilyn Monroe in a red dress standing with her arms wide open. It was the poster of “Friends Film Festival at the Cinematheque” that Seoul Art Cinema hosts early every year. Kubo, instead of feeling sentimental about how fast the year went by (隔世之感), grew anxious that he did not yet belong (東) to the “friends” of the cinematheque.

January of last year (一年前一月), fresh back from a study abroad in France, Kubo was a young man flush with ambition (功名心) to make a name for himself as a film critic. He had vowed to be invited to the film festival a year later as one of the friends, but he now found his

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49 Uri can mean we, our, or us, depending on the usage.
way into the Friends Festival as an outsider, already so aged. Kubo, remembering the prime of his youth when he still had dreams, asks himself what made him so old and worn. He wants to find an concrete enemy (敵), but all he can do is to resent the world in abstraction (抽象). Kubo the film critic thus came to understand the meaning of years only after discovering the symptom (徵候) of old age (老年) called *tedium vitae* (厭世感). He could not watch the opening film directed by Murnau since he had to leave soon, but he nonetheless entered the theater as he fumbled with his wallet that he took out of his breast pocket for no reason. He knew only too well that he would run into acquaintances (因緣) who, unlike him, are actively working as critics (評論家), but his unconscious had already wedged out the ego (ego) and was on its way to the darkroom (暗室) from where the motion picture was being projected. Did not a certain theorist (理論家) say that the experience of watching a film is to regress (退行) into the subconscious? If that subconscious turns towards darkness, it would only be right for a film maniac (狂) to obey. Somehow, Kubo finds himself becoming gallant. The superego (超自我) that wanted to keep the appointment with his friend had long submitted to the unconscious, and, like a neuropathy (神經症), a feeling of certainty budded inside that he would be able to watch the film as artlessly as he would with an old friend. Kubo the neo-Freudian (*neo-p’ūroidiōn*) decides to allow (許) more liberty to his unconscious.

Kubo stood in the line.

Unwitting audiences led by the subconscious lined up at the box office. As if the things that had been repressed for the past year returned (歸還) right at that moment and muddled the critic’s consciousness, Kubo’s ears were exposed to more rumpus than usual. He caught a throng (一軍) of cinephiles in the middle of a heated discussion about Murnau.
Murnau directed his first feature film, *The Blue Boy*, in 1919. From that year on until 1926 when the ‘Fox’ called him to Hollywood, he made 21 features. Unfortunately the majority of the films he made in Germany did not survive except for some broken bits and pieces. A lot of people had a go at studying the Jekyll and Hyde personality and Murnau too made *Nosferatu* with a subtitle *A Symphony of Horror* in 1921. It was a more faithful version of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* than any other films that came after it. The acting of Max Schreck who played the hairraising vampire is still believable.

Then there is *The Last Laugh* (1924) starring Emil Jannings. The acting alone tells the story so flawlessly that it’s captionless. The real revolution of this film was the moving camera which Murnau used so deftly. The dynamic camera goes anywhere. The audience was mesmerized by the camera that moved up and down the stairs and in and out the doors. It was a revolutionary artistry back then to make such an extravagant picture out of a simple story of a proud doorman demoted to a washroom attendant because of his age. He is also called an impressionist because he produced amazing spectacles and a sense of realism through his technique of the camera movements...et cetera et cetera et cetera. 50

Kubo feels small because of the surrealistic amount of film knowledge the general audience has and imagines, as he shifts (轉嫁) the locus of his self-deprecation (自激之心) to his business card (名銜) in his wallet that says he is a film critic, that the man who poured out an impassioned speech without even remembering to put spaces between words is in fact a debater (論客) out of office (在野), himself yet to be included among the friends. That, however, did not save his face as an academic (學人). As he felt the need to find a way to save himself, he thought of his teacher, Dr. Sigmund Freud (P’ŭroit’ ŭ). And he arrived at Jacques-Marie-Émile Lacan (Chak’ŭ Lak’ang), a fellow disciple and an elder brother (同門師兄) who is much older (年高) than himself. Kubo was thus giving birth to a new idea (思想) through the metonymy of

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50 In the original, there is no space between words.
consciousness. *Let the business card have the subjectivity of the film critic; it’s only a construction of this abstract world. The subconscious of film critics is not facing the darkroom but only lined up to get connections to directors. My unconscious will be foregrounded (前景化) by getting rid of the business card. Cinema wants to befriend the subconscious, not a film critic.*

In Kubo’s mind, the three debaters (論者) he ran into were Kerberos that guarded the entrance to the “Friends”; he imagined passing them by and arriving at the abyss of myth.

In no time, there was only one college girl left to purchase her ticket in front of Kubo. Kubo was a bit rundown as he suffered the last rite of passage (通過儀禮) to the “Friends” and stood even closer behind her as he held his wallet. The student turned around after receiving her precious ticket. Alas, Kubo collided with her as if with Persephone herself in the underworld. Kubo’s wallet dropped to the ground and spat out a credit card, a transportation card, and a few beauty salon coupons. The student, all flustered, stooped down hurriedly to gather the things and offered a word of apology as she handed him his wallet. Kubo caught a whiff of the sweet scent of shampoo. Right at that moment, Kubo realizes that he had been in the wrong about his unconscious all along. He was hoping secretly for his business card—for which he paid fifteen thousand wŏn at Uljiro 4-ga to inscribe “Kim Kubo, Film Critic” (映畫評論家金侶)—to be stuck in there among the beauty salon coupons. His unconscious had not yet disposed of the film critic’s business card. It was a moment in which he recouped his lost ambition after a long year. He recalls how his unconscious led him to Nagwŏn Arcade an hour ago. The subconscious seemed to remember Kubo the young man who returned home with ambition a year ago. That is why it made him line up behind the girl’s head instead of the darkroom. His subconscious had prepared a business card in his wallet and made him stand in the line holding it, all to interpellate him as a film critic.
Kubo the film critic handed the student a business card with a warm smile of a middle-aged man and gained (得) a feeling of rejuvenation (回春) as he walked out of Nagwŏn Arcade. His friend of sixteen years was waiting for him in Insa-dong.

**Intertextuality: between and behind the texts**

*To have it out or not? that is the question—*  
*Whether 'tis better for the jaws to suffer*  
*The pangs and torments of an aching tooth,*  
*Or to take steel against a host of troubles*  
—The Dental Soliloquy*

*A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic*, as introduced above, borrows its title from *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist* (1934), the colonial period (1910-1945) novella written by Pak T’aewŏn (1909-1986). A close friend of the ultra-modernist poet Yi Sang (1910-1937) whose literary double appears in one of Pak’s works (Kim 2008: 486), Pak himself was a modernist writer of pure literature (*sunsu munhak*) that separates literature from politics (480). In the narrative, that Kubo is an intellectual living under Japanese colonial rule is likewise not the most central subject matter although it is a significant background that informs the narrative. Pure literature as a concept opposed, in particular, proletarian literature (*kyegŭp munhak*) of the time although Pak is equally famous for having turned to the Left after the liberation from Japan in 1945 and defected to the North at the onset of the Korean War in 1950.

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51 This is an excerpt from “Hamlet at the Dentist’s” (Müller 1997: 131, 141). I use the example of the “dental soliloquy” to explain the adaptability of *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist* later in the chapter.

52 It was serialized in *Chosŏn chungang ilbo* (Korean central daily) from August 1 to September 11 of 1934.

53 Pak T’aewŏn joins Kuinhoe (“the league of nine”), a literary society that supported pure literature, in 1933.

54 Sometimes referred to as “tendency literature” (*kyŏnghyang munhak*).
While the most interesting tidbit from Pak’s biography for today’s cinephiles must be that he is the maternal grandfather of the star filmmaker Bong Joon-ho, Pak’s move to the North is not insignificant for understanding the intertextuality between the many versions of *Kubo the Novelist*—there are several as I discuss below. This, of course, includes *Kubo the Film Critic* written in the next turn of the century by a cinephile of a similar age as Pak himself at the time of writing *Kubo the Novelist*. I would suggest, in this regard, that An, the cinephile writer, has not merely imitated *Kubo the Novelist* but participated in a literary subculture of parodying the beloved fictional persona. This point will be made clearer when I explain how An borrows narrative motifs and writing structure also from Ch’oe Inhun’s *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist* (1969-1972), arguably the most well-known postwar era adaptation of the work.

There are, as I have mentioned, a sizeable number of adaptations and parodies of the original *Kubo the Novelist* despite the fact that all of Pak’s works, branded wholesale as “red,” remained officially banned until as late as 1988 in South Korea (*Minjong21 September 2003*). A literary columnist, in fact, notes that no other piece in modern Korean literature has been the object of as many parodies (*p’aerŏdi*) and homages (*omaju*) as *Kubo the Novelist*.

Pak T’aewŏn himself must have had no idea how his multifaceted and experimental novella would inspire the next generation of authors and continue to live as parodies. Between 1969 and 1972, a period when Pak’s works were still banned [in South Korea] because of his repatriation to the North, Ch’oe Inhun (1936–) wrote as many as fifteen episodes of *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Novelist* and published the series as a book. In the early 1990s, Chu Insŏk (1963–) produced five installments … and Yun Humyŏng (1946–) released two episodes [under the same title] in the 2000s. Although it is not a novel, O Kyuwŏn (1941-2007)’s 1987 poetry collection … includes fourteen pieces of “A Day in the Life of Kubo the Poet.”

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56 The various versions of *Kubo the Novelists* are generally called as parodies (*p’aerŏdi*); see, for example, Kim K. (2009: 116).

57 Interview with Pak Hyŏnsuk, the CEO of a publisher that introduced “defector literature” in the 1980s.

58 Ch’oe, Chaebong. “Authors in the world of mirrors, 10: a day in the life of Kubo the novelist” (Kŏul nara chakka dŭl, 10: sosŏlgŭa Kubo-ssi ŭi iril) in *Culture webzine nabi* (Munhwa webjin nabi, October 12, 2009).
Kubo’s popularity in literature is indeed remarkable considering how at least two writers did not fear crossing political color lines in the South where every aspect of life used to be governed by the strong anticommunist military regimes (see Armstrong 2007; Cumings 2007; Koo 1993). South Korean governments have exercised strict anticommunist censorship under the banner of national security well past the Seoul Olympics in 1988 when the discourse of reunification entered public education and replaced that of anticommunism under the newly elected president Roh Tae-woo (1987-1993). As late as the winter of 1989, the government continued its surveillance over literary activities and, for example, arrested the editor-in-chief of Changjak kwa pip’yŏng (Creation and criticism), a prestigious literary journal, when he published a travelogue to North Korea that he received from Hwang Sŏgyŏng (1943-) who was staying in West Germany at the time (Dong-A Daily 24 November 1989).

That the literary life of Kubo-ssi continued after the end of the military regimes suggests, moreover, that the writers had not been interested exclusively in making a political statement with their adaptations of the novella with a political stigma. References to Kubo continue to proliferate even outside of literature today, a few examples of which would include an archaeological travelogue that recreates Kubo’s day in old Seoul (Cho 2009); a history of modern photography narrated from the perspective of the author as Kubo (Yi K. 2007); an English-language publication on eco-conscious consumption, which in translation adds the story of a day in the life of Kubo the contemporary consumer living in Seoul (Ryan and Durning 1997;
trans. Ko 2002); and a collection of the musings of Kubo the novelist on movies and contemporary film culture (Chu 1997).59

Kubo the Novelist, then, is not imitated necessarily or exclusively for the political (either anticolonial or leftist) implications that the author’s move to the North contributed ironically to the novella beyond the narrative itself. I argue instead that the useful elements in the original(s) are the narrative structure and the idiosyncratic character of a flâneur.60 In other words, it is easy to recycle, if you would, the story of a day in the life of an individual as well as the motif of a man who has nothing better to do but to take a stroll and observe the world around him in deep self-reflection, making his interiority intimate to the readers. Kubo is in fact not very different from the Parisian flâneur (Benjamin 1989)61 whose habitat was in the boulevards outside the arcades and who, in spite of his precarious economic standing, excelled in his “trade of not trading” (Buck-Morss 2006: 35). The flâneur, in other words, is not able to do anything except to observe, the only way of making the social space personal.62 Kubo the colonial intellectual dwells likewise in the margins of his own habitat, educated but disempowered and in constant search of happiness.63 That the act of beholding characterizes Kubo—he observes old Seoul in

59 The PIFF episode in Chu’s book is the most analogous to Critic; however, there is no particular evidence of intertextuality between the two. This book is written by Chu Insŏk who is mentioned in the literary columnist’s short history of Novelist.

60 For further discussions on the theme of Kubo as a flâneur (sanch’aekja) in relation to the modern city, see Kim Tongsik (2008: 487) and Ch’ŏn Chŏng-hwan (2005: 451).

61 Benjamin’s The Arcades Project was written between 1927 and 1940, contemporaneous of Novelist. Kubo’s similarity to the flâneur is striking in statements such as this: “That anamnestic intoxication in which the flâneur goes about the city not only feeds on the sensory data taking shape before his eyes but often possesses itself of abstract knowledge—indeed, of dead facts—as something experienced and lived through” (417).

62 Buck-Morss argues that “flânerie was an ideological attempt to reprivatize social space, and to give assurance that the individual’s passive observation was adequate for knowledge of social reality” (36).

63 Kubo’s search of happiness is a recurring motif in Pak’s Novelist.
order to take on modernology (*modōnolloji*) in the original—is, then, not a haphazard motif but arguably a defining trait of the weak who is unable to do nothing but.

The point I would like to stress is that the motifs of looking and loitering in addition to the plot structure are the elements that render the original so adaptable. Parody of this kind has been in fact popular in the history of literature. I will use an unrelated but a famous example for the sake of making a clear comparison. Hamlet the prince of Denmark, not surprisingly, was the singularly favored literary figure impersonated by the writers of the Victorian era when parody used to be a near “spectator sport” as shown in the epigraph of “Hamlet at the Dentist’s” (Müller 1997: 131, 141). What makes Hamlet such a ready-made persona to imitate is, without a doubt, his anguish and indecisiveness embodied in his famous monologue, “To be, or not to be,” quite apart from the particularities of his dire circumstance. It is the signature, so to speak, of this easily adaptable phrase that makes Hamlet the object of so many parodies. It is the same with Kubo. His walks and thoughts are a signature that can be copied (cf. Ch’ŏn 2005: 447-475). 64

*Kubo the Novelist*, however, is not quite the same as the forged signature on the Purloined Letter whose form matters greater than its content (see Poe 1844; Johnson 1977). In the subculture of adapting *Kubo the Novelist*, in other words, a parodied work loses much meaning as an adaptation if the format of the original text is copied without regards to the content of the text. 65 I use the term intertextuality, therefore, more than in “the banal sense of

64 Ch’ŏn Chŏnghwan offers a slightly different but valid argument that the next generation writers wrote the novels with the same title because “Kubo” became a byword for the Korean “novelist” as Novel*ist* was considered the modernist novel par excellence (471-2).

65 Barbara Johnson discusses Edgar Allen Poe’s “The Purloined Letter” as follows: “The letter acts like a signifier precisely to the extent that its function in the story does not require that its meaning be revealed: ‘the letter was able to produce its effects within the story: on the actors in the tale, including the narrator, as well as outside the story: on us, the readers, and also on its author, without anyone’s ever bothering to worry about what it meant’ (not translated in SPL; *Écrits*, p. 57, translation and emphasis mine). ‘The Purloined Letter’ thus becomes for Lacan a kind of allegory of the signifier” (464).
‘study of sources’” (Kristeva 1984: 60). It is true that the particular ways in which the original(s) is written provides a ready-made plot structure and character for the cinephile writer. I maintain, however, that the genealogy of *Kubo the Novelists* demonstrates intertextuality in a narrower sense that points to the “transposition … of enunciative and denotative positionality” (Kristeva 1984: 60, original italics). In other words, Kubo’s socio-discursive position as a speaking subject changes every time he is transposed to a different historical period. Walking and thinking, on the one hand, are the markers that brand Kubo’s living on the margins of society. The same, on the other hand, are empty forms that can be reproduced and filled differently every time. In each parody, therefore, Kubo observes and critiques the particular time from which he speaks. The first *Kubo the Novelist* (1934), for instance, sketches the portrait of a passive intellectual of the colonial period. The postwar novelist (Ch’oe Inhun, 1969-1972), on the other hand, is concerned with the division of the two Koreas. A later one of the novelists (Chu Insŏk, 1991-1995) likewise grapples with the irreconcilable difference between the memories of the 1980s and the realities of the 1990s.\(^\text{66}\)

*Kubo the Film Critic* offers similarly the portrait of youth in contemporary South Korea although, like the original, the stories are not preoccupied with the politics of the time. I have introduced Kubo the film critic above as a literary or imaginary double of young cinephiles of today. Like the critic, it is not easy for them to land a stable job even with a degree from a top-tier university. Their cosmopolitan tastes in film and knowledge of foreign theories are likewise mere cultural capital that does not necessarily promise economic security. The film critic, in this regard, is arguably a fictional embodiment of the “88-*manwŏn* generation,” a now-popular term coined by U Sŏkhun and Pak Kwŏnil, an economist-journalist team. *88-*manwŏn*, which is

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\(^{66}\) Ch’oe, Chaebong. ibid.
roughly equivalent to 880 US dollars, is to suggest the average monthly wage that young adults in their twenties earn as temp workers (2007: 20). South Korean youths are, in general, highly and perhaps excessively educated both in and out of the school. It is, however, an entirely different matter when it comes to actually using their educational assets because the unequal structure of the labor market preempts their entrance to a significant degree. That the youth must compete against each other is only a given in a neoliberal society, according to U and Pak. The authors tackle at the heart of the problem that the competition continues against the “military rule” and “386” generations who are already established in society and are not likely to make way for the next generation (17-19). U likens the status quo to the film Battle Royale, the narrative of a sadistic game of survival (18). Kubo’s predicament speaks, however lightly, to this brutality. The film critic, like today’s university graduates, is over-educated but under-employed for his very capabilities. With a degree in film studies from France, he cannot even find the peace of mind to buy himself a hottŏk for snack. Today’s young men and women, like Kubo, likewise continue taking the risk of becoming over-educated in pursuit of security and fulfillment.

*Kubo the Film Critic*, in this sense, is a “parody” in a couple of different ways. It reproduces, on the one hand, the literary style and form of *Kubo the Novelists* for its own use. It, on the other hand, transcends the context of the originals to comment on the present. In either

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67 U and Pak coined this term after the “mileuristas [the thousand euro generation], Spaniards who ... have university degrees, advanced training, speak a variety of languages, and have gained valuable work experiences [but] only have encountered an impenetrable barrier to stable jobs and salaries greater than 1000 Euros per month” (Knutson 2009: 142). 88-manwón generation youth, while representing a different nation and currency, share the same predicaments that the mileuristas have.

68 The military rule generation or the yushin generation refers to those who came of age during the Park Chung Hee’s regime (1961-1979). The 386 generation refers to those who were born in the 1960s and attended college in the 1980s; and were in their thirties, when the term was coined in the 1990s.

69 This is a reference to *Battle Royale* (Kinji Fukasaku, 2000). See Neyrat (2006) for further discussion on this film.
way, however, *Kubo the Film Critic* does not fit the particular category of “parody” that makes fun of the original in the colloquial sense of the word. The cinephilic adaptation, to borrow the words of Linda Hutcheon, “is repetition, but repetition that includes difference (Deleuze 1968)” (2000 [1985]: 37). It is, in other words, not merely an outcome of purely textual and formal relations or a straightforward hermeneutic exercise that depends entirely on the imagination of the reader-writer. The literary columnist was quite right in saying that the adaptations of *Kubo the Novelist* have been both parodies (*p’aerŏdi*) and homage (*omaju*).

**A parody of pedantic cinephiles**

It is from the understanding that youth are neoliberal subjects burdened by the demands of self-management and competition that I look at the parody in *Kubo the Film Critic* as a critique of the pedantic culture of cinephiles. To put it differently, *Kubo the Film Critic* illustrates or imagines how without knowledge or education the worth of youth can be reduced to nothing as I discuss in my analysis. A noticeable difference between *Kubo the Film Critic* and *Kubo the Novelists*, in fact, is the ways in which the former uses the motif of knowledge and intellectual life as a means of mocking the film critic whereas the same motif constitutes a realistic portrayal of the novelist. In the following, I limit my comparison to the two versions of

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70 Hutcheon further defines parody as “imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways. Ironic versions of ‘trans-contextualization’ and inversion are its major formal operatives, and the range of pragmatic ethos is from scornful ridicule to reverential homage” (37). She discusses “intertextuality” in the works of, for example, Kristeva (1969), Genette (1982), and Jenny (1976) and the “modality of perception” in the works, for example, of Riffaterre (1980) and Barthes (1975).

71 Ch.3 on the “Bordwell regime” is an example of such academically driven culture among cinephiles in South Korea.
Kubo the Novelists written by Pak (1934) and Ch’oe (1969-1972) as the adaptation is largely based on these.

The motif of erudition, as I have noted, contributes directly to the realistic depiction of Kubo the intellectual in both Kubo the Novelists. By realism, apart from its historical and theoretical development, I do not mean the representation of truth but only a believable representation. It is besides the fact that Kubo the Novelists are considered paragons of modernism, which is conventionally considered antithetical to realism. The novelist, to wit, becomes a realistic character, a believable case, particularly on account of the detailed descriptions of his intellectual life. Kubo the colonized intellectual, for instance, has an encyclopedic knowledge of pathologies, contemplates about modern capitalism, and observes the modern city. Kubo the postwar novelist likewise gives lectures, interacts with other intellectuals, and discusses authors such as Beckett and Chekhov. In Kubo the Film Critic, on the other hand, the man’s pitiable notes on the metropolitan—clearly a parody of modernology—render him questionable as an intellectual. The second episode, “The Freudian Rings the Bell Twice,” in particular, is conspicuously pseudo-academic with its purposeful misuse of psychoanalytic jargons. I am, however, not quite interested in highlighting the almost comical appropriation of (some defunct) Freudian terms. A smart psychoanalytic drama unfolds instead at the level of the plot structure as “the bell rings twice.”

In order to find the hidden meaning in the plot, however, we first need to consider yet another thread of intertextuality. The title of the episode is clearly a twist on The Postman Always Rings Twice (Tay Garnett, 1946), which is based on a 1934 crime novel by James M.

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72 See Morris (2003) for a more comprehensive overview on this very “slippery” term.

Cain. There is, however, “no postman in the book, no doorbell, and no single, dual, or any ring” (Dexter 2008: 168). The same is true of Kubo the Film Critic. The hidden meaning in the plot structure, I would say, is precisely a matter of finding how exactly the bell rings in the narrative. We can start unearthing by looking at an account of how Cain decided upon the book title while having a causal conversation. In the following, the screenwriter Vincent Lawrence has been telling Cain about how anxious he becomes whenever he waits to hear from his producer:

Then, he [Lawrence] said, ‘I almost went nuts. I’d sit and watch for the postman, and then I’d think, “You got to cut this out,” and then when I left the window I’d be listening for his ring. How I’d know it was the postman was that he’d always ring twice.’

He went on with more of the harrowing tale, but I [Cain] cut in on him suddenly. I said:

‘Vincent, I think you’ve given me a title for that book.’
‘What’s that?’
‘The Postman Always Rings Twice.’
‘Say, he rang twice for Chambers, didn’t he?’
‘That’s the idea.’
‘And on that second ring, Chambers had to answer, didn’t he? Couldn’t hide out in the backyard any more.’
‘His number was up, I’d say.
‘I like it.’
‘Then that’s it.’

The postman in the book is, in this way, a metaphor for “fate, nemesis, retribution, [and] divine justice” (Dexter 2008: 168) that visits Frank Chambers for the second and the last time to announce that his days are finally numbered for murdering the husband of Cora Papadakis, a woman whom he has an affair with. That the title of the episode cites the film while the story has nothing to do with bells or the film itself is quite significant because, I believe, we are left with only one possible answer as to why the author decided to borrow the movie title.

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74 There are other film adaptations of the novel including Le dernier tournant (Pierre Chenal, 1939), Ossessione (Luchino Visconti, 1942), and a Hollywood remake of the same title (Bob Rafelson, 1981).

75 Ibid.
In the episode replete with psychoanalytic discourse, the bell that rings twice points undoubtedly to—not a Freudian but—the Lacanian “letter,” which is tantamount to the signifier (Fink 2004: 77). What is of particular importance is that the letter/signifier is in itself meaningless and therefore “constantly insists in inscribing itself in the subject’s life” (Evans 2001: 100). It, in other words, delivers fate—this should not be confused as “death” as in the case of Frank Chambers—just as the bell announces the fate of the listener. In yet simpler words, the letter must return again and again as the subject’s significance (existence) ceases to be without the signifier that gives meaning. The postman’s bell, in a sense, is an unseen sign of how a “letter always arrives at its destination” (Žižek 2001: 10). Slavoj Žižek, commenting on the film *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, notes that the murderer’s “fate is sealed” and “events take their inexorable course” because the letter cannot *not* arrive at its destination (169, original italics). The murderer can no longer fake his identity or believe in his own fabrication.

In “The Freudian Rings the Bell Twice,” we likewise see a letter arriving at its destination and announcing the fate of Kubo the film critic. It is none other than his business card. The first instance in which Kubo remembers his business card is when he encounters a film buff at the Friends Film Festival. Kubo feels small compared to the man whose knowledge of film is larger than life. In spite of himself, however, Kubo at first rejects his business card as a metonym for a film critic, which he denounces as a sorry figure of a man lined up to get to know directors. He instead chooses defiantly to be a true friend of cinema and gets in the line to purchase a ticket to a screening. At this point in the psychoanalytical drama, however, Kubo can

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76 The letter, more precisely, is “the essentially localized structure of the signifier” (*Écrits* 501)” (Fink 2004: 79).

77 This is my understanding of Lacan.

78 This phrase is originally Lacan’s. Whether or not Žižek is right about his critique of Derrida’s reading of Lacan—namely, if it is possible for the letter to *not* arrive at its destination—is outside the scope of this dissertation. See, for example, Rabaté (2003) and Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee (2008) for more.
no longer refuse to receive the letter that delivers his fate. Kubo, likely to be sexually deprived as well,\textsuperscript{79} stands a tad bit too close behind the girl who is getting her ticket and, alas, collides with her. From this accident, Kubo’s wallet drops to the ground, spilling out a credit card, a transportation card, and a few beauty salon coupons. Before he is able to collect himself, however, he wishes for his business card to be stuck among the coupons for the girl to see. Kubo has no way but to admit that he was in the wrong about his identity. He is and loves being a film critic. It is no coincidence that the girl is given a grand entrance as a Persephone—the goddess of underworld. It is as if the girl announces the symbolic “death”\textsuperscript{80} of Kubo without his identity as a film critic. Kubo must receive the letter since he is worthless without his fate, without the signifier that tells him that he is a film critic. With the letter—the business card—at its destination, Kubo now walks out of the theater feeling young once again.

This episode, on the one hand, mocks the pedantic culture of cinephiles by showing in the narrative content that his education is of no great value; it hardly puts food on the table. Education is certainly one type of capital, but film theory is no way near the education capital proper for South Koreans who seek stable and well-paying occupations such as medical doctors or civil servants. In this sense, the story is comparable to Pak’s Kubo the Novelist in which Kubo is unable to (or refuses to) find a job that pays him a monthly salary even with a university degree from Tokyo. This episode as such offers a funny and pitiable spectacle of a social misfit, a film snob who has nothing to speak of except the little knowledge that he has. What is fundamentally different from the originals, however, is that, in Kubo the Film Critic, it is a person’s worth—apart from his economic capability (remember that a subject is rendered

\textsuperscript{79} Sexual privation is another characteristic of Kubo the novelist in Pak’s work.

\textsuperscript{80} Again, death is not to be confused with fate; the girl is not the letter but the business card is.
nothing without the signifier)—that is at stake. By embedding a critical theory not only in the narrative content but also in the plot structure, the story seems to offer a meta-theoretical or intellectual commentary: will the 88-manwŏn generation be anything without education? Even a film critic whose education does not add up to much has to hold on to his, the sole guarantor of his worth, the letter that must arrive. To put this in a more mundane light, the episode acknowledges the sad reality that knowledge has become nothing, unless marked by a price tag.

**Cineliteracy: writing a cinematic text**

The character of Kubo the film critic, in this way, takes after the colonized intellectual rather than the postwar novelist in that he is a dreamer, spending more time on observing than doing anything. The writer, however, borrows the formal structure and literary motifs quite significantly from the postwar version of *Kubo the Novelist* serialized by Ch’oe Inhun in 1969-1972. Whereas the colonial period piece tells the story of a single day in the life of the novelist (in addition to a brief account of his mother’s), like *Kubo the Film Critic*, each episode in the postwar novel narrates a day in the life of the novelist with the entire collection of stories spanning about three years in time. In addition, motifs such as savoring one fifteenth portion of hŏttŏk at a time (a twist on tobacco), a magnanimous heart, the cries of magpies in the morning, and the imagination of the countryside are all conspicuous signs of parody of the postwar version in the fan adaptation. There is, however, an aspect that is fundamentally different between the two. That is to say, the cinophile author transforms the writerly text of Ch’oe’s *Kubo the Novelist* into a cinematic one. The first paragraph in each *Kubo*, in particular, is analogous to each other except for the fact that *Kubo the Film Critic* incorporates filmic elements that are
largely absent in Ch’oe’s original as I illustrate below. For the sake of comparison, I translate
the first paragraph in the first episode of the postwar *Kubo the Novelist*.

As the year 1969 drew to a close, on a morning a few days before the end of the winter solstice, Kubo, a novelist, woke up from his sleep. As he woke up, something that looked like a scroll unfurled in his head and soon disappeared. Kubo recognized it right away; it was a to-do list for the day. That scroll vanished in a wink of an eye as it was meant for Kubo and him only. Kubo stayed in bed even after waking from his slumber. A magpie is crying; Kubo pictured the bird that must be bobbing its head every time its vocal chords vibrate as it sits on the end of a leafless branch on one of the few paulownia trees planted in the apartment’s lawn outside his window that was only about three or four steps away from his bed. Then, as always, Kubo became melancholy. Although Kubo was an exceptionally scientific novelist, he was very superstitious when it came to the cry of magpies in the morning. Kubo questioned why he had such a folklore\(^{81}\) heart when he did not even grow up in the countryside. Then, the sad feelings disappeared. It’s always like this, Kubo thought; he felt yet another sort of sadness. That the cry of magpie is sorrowful means this. They say a good thing will happen when a magpie cries.\(^{82}\)

The reader may encounter many things here but only as a series of mental images that Kubo the novelist pictures in his mind: the scroll that delivers a to-do list; a magpie that Kubo does not see but nonetheless describes in detail; and the neighborhood only as he remembers. In other words, we see everything through his interiority, a distinctive trait of a modernist literary work (see Karatani 1993; Lippit 2002; Shin 2004). The reader of *Kubo the Novelist* experiences an *ersatz* first person point of view of Kubo (as if he is the narrator) although he is a third person character because the narrator allows the reader to see exactly what Kubo himself sees without necessarily showing him from the moment he opens his eyes from his sleep. To rephrase in filmic terms, we do not see Kubo much from the camera’s point of view.

This is exactly the difference that a reader can experience in *Kubo the Film Critic*. Instead of sharing Kubo’s vision, we see him as we listen to his thoughts on alarm clocks, temple bells, and rural life. *Kubo the Film Critic*, in other words, produces an effect of seeing from the camera’s point of view. Although the camera’s point of view is certainly not the only way of

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\(^{81}\) *t’osok ūi*  

\(^{82}\) As of the fall of 2010, there is no English translation available for this novel.
experiencing vision in film (e.g., shot-reverse-shot), a film, generally speaking, cannot be without the apparatus. *Kubo the Film Critic*, moreover, adds a series of actions that is missing in the original. These actions are rendered cinematic through the narrator’s use of elliptical editing. An ellipsis, in brief, signifies a temporal transition from a shot (one continuous take) to the next shot, thus presenting the story faster than in the narrative time. It is a temporal jump cut, so to speak. *Kubo the film critic*, for instance, wakes up and thinks about magpies and temple bells in his bed quite like the novelist. In the next sentence (shot), however, we see him brushing his teeth as he muses on about the urban and rural lives. In the following sentences, we see him moving place to place: leaving home, lighting a cigarette in the elevator, and in no time walking out in the streets. As a writerly text, it is perhaps delivered too hurriedly, lacking in intimate descriptions of the protagonist. As a cinematic text, however, we can appreciate the economical execution of the narrative as we listen to the narrator as in a voiceover narration (the adaptation is also much shorter than the original). While we learn quickly of the details such as that *Kubo* left home without his breakfast, we experience a greater amount of dynamic visual movements than in the original. The “vital principle” of film indeed lies beyond performance or even beauty; it is rather “the sheer pleasure of watching someone—a specific body—moving on screen” (Keathley 2006: 49).

I imagine that such filmic qualities beyond the movie references in *Kubo the Film Critic* are what a cinephile who reads the episodes would find exciting. I suggest, moreover, that the transformation of a writerly text into a cinematic text points to the generation who are fluent in visual language. This explains partially why the cinephile writer has borrowed more from the

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83 A shot-reverse-shot in the simplest form is a construction of three shots that establishes a subject’s point of view by showing the subject, the object being looked at, and then the subject. In other words, we know who is looking and at what.
postwar *Kubo the Novelist* by Ch’oe to write his prose. Pak, the author of the colonial period piece, is himself known for his writing style that is inspired by filmic technique of storytelling (see Park B. 2008; Kim Y. 2000). Had the writer used Pak’s work only instead of participating in the literary subculture of parodying his novella, he would not have been able to write an effective parody, the one that repeats but with difference. The ways in which *Kubo the Film Critic* is narrated imply that visuality is a part and parcel of the language of the generation who grew up with visual media. Indeed, in both episodes introduced in this chapter, the “last promenade” of Kubo is the theater, the place where the fantasies of the *flâneur* materializes (895). This is also likely why the *Kubo the Film Critic* series ended prematurely after just three episodes although the writer resigned from the magazine for personal reasons. Solely from the perspective of the narrative, I suggest that the narrator of *Kubo the Film Critic* could no longer recount Kubo’s daily life because, in the third episode, the poor critic ends up at a “B” film festival (not of B-movies). Hosted by a Pak Ch’an’guk, the festival happens a few subway stations away from where the Pusan International Film Festival is held. Once the cinephile leaves his last promenade proper, there are, sadly, no more stories left to tell.

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In this chapter, I have introduced *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic*, a series of short stories that provides an imaginary portrait of the cinephiles I discuss in my dissertation. In the following chapters, I present the cinephiles themselves who watch a great number of movies and whose command of film language is tantamount to their native tongue. Imagine realistic

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84 The last promenade for the *flâneur* is the department store, “which makes use of flânerie itself to sell goods” (10); “There his fantasies were materialized” (895).

85 The pun is that Park Chan-wook is an avid fan of B-movies.
(not many aim for a career in cinema), hardworking (knowledge comes at a price), and younger and much less sorry undergraduate versions of Kubo.
Chapter Two

Cinema as Everyday Practice: A College Film Club

This chapter introduces the setting of Cinepol, the film club at a university in Seoul where I participated as a member-researcher. In the first half of the chapter, I review how I came to choose Cinepol as the site of my fieldwork, as well as the first impressions of this group. I then follow two of the early conversations I had with the club members to discuss the multifaceted beginnings of university film clubs that began as student movement groups (undongkwŏn) that fought broadly for democracy and human rights in the early 1980s. Film clubs are no longer activist groups on university campuses since the democratization and the end of military dictatorship in the 1990s. Rather than examining the nature of the rupture, however, I trace the cinephilic roots of the early film clubs that I identify in Cinepol today and suggest, in specific, that the political focus of cinephiles moved gradually from that of the subject matter to the poetics of representation throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

In the second half of this chapter, I turn the clock forward to discuss how technology has influenced today’s university students as cinephiles. It is, in fact, quite impossible to think about this generation without considering the influence of the Internet. Although, as I have discussed in the Introduction, film fans living in Seoul are relatively blessed with a wide variety of films available on the big screen year-round that creates a cinephobic atmosphere in the city, the influence of the online digital archives perhaps weighs heavier than anything else when it comes to their viewing practices. In Cinepol, many students likewise use the Internet to access their own online “personal film libraries,” one of the primary ways in which they accumulate massive knowledge of world films and acquire cosmopolitan tastes. Based on what the club members
shared with me, I propose that the Internet has brought film to the most intimate space for this generation—the PC—and as such has made film an everyday practice as opposed to how in the early years of film viewers experienced cinema as a communal event (see Hansen 1991). The digital viewing, moreover, has altered the viewing habits of many cinephiles to have more control of what they watch, what Laura Mulvey calls an “interactive spectatorship” (2006: 27). The theme of intimacy with (or intimate knowledge of) film will resonate in various ways in the next two chapters in which I discuss the details of the club activities (chapter 3) and their cinephilic discourses (chapter 4).

**Cinepol: a college film club**

I already have introduced a cinephile in the form of a fictional character in *A Day in the Life of Kubo the Film Critic* written by a cinephile author himself in the previous chapter. Cinepol is a film club at a university in Seoul where I met students who, just as each Kubo is an icon of an artist-intellectual of an era, are model cinephiles who watch and study film weekly as a group. In the course of preparing for my fieldwork, I did not find it difficult to confirm that there is a cinephilic subculture among university students in South Korea. It was as easy as going online because the vast majority of South Koreans, especially younger generations, depend on the Internet— their “habitus” (see Yoon 2001). As I discuss later in this chapter, I found the online space to be an indispensable part of film as an everyday practice for the club members.

I particularly remember one article from an online film magazine that features a series of interviews with a number of university film clubs in Seoul that encouraged me to settle on working with university students after having decided to study the local film culture beyond the
industrial and textual aspects of South Korean cinema. I have later found the film clubs featured in the magazine to be similar to what I have experienced in Cinepol although some are more production oriented and others more academic. I was led to this article because of the words “yŏnghwa tongari” (film club) that I used in my Google search. I favored them over “yŏnghwa kwan’gaek” (film audience), an equally reasonable choice, because the concept of audience in my experience in reading South Korean news media had been often connected to the discourse on the box-office sales of domestic films (verses foreign) in the country. I also preferred “tongari” to “tonghohoe,” another word that can be translated roughly as a club. The main difference between the two words lies in how the membership is determined: the former often connotes student groups and the latter an open membership. My observation of a few internet “cafes” (k’ap’e) of open-membership film clubs suggested that their members met also for the sake of meeting people and socializing (pŏn’gae) perhaps more often than not for the sake of watching and discussing about movies although I acknowledge that it is difficult to draw the line between the two.

More importantly, however, my ethnographic “hunch” (Haviland, et al. 2010) was that working with a group that has an open membership would lead me right back to one of the questions I started my project with. That is to say, interacting with an open audience group was likely to produce writing on the cinemophilia of the general public that, to a significant degree, had been inspired by nationalistic sentiment. By this, I specifically refer to the kind that, for example, made practically the entire country respond with collective excitement to the success of Swiri (1999) that I have described in the Introduction. Indeed, it would not be farfetched to say (with some exaggeration) that the post-Swiri moment was the time when “everyone” became a film fan in South Korea. To put it differently, this was “a time when even non-cinephiles had an
experience of cinephilia” (Keathley 2006: 12). The post-Swiri effect on South Korean film audiences was perhaps short-lived and died out as film producers began churning out low quality films (along with the good) especially with the sudden flux of capital into the industry. It is, however, undeniable that South Koreans became much more interested in cinema since Swiri. As I began fieldwork, I had hypothesized that I would be able to complicate the one-dimensional image of the domestic-versus-Hollywood binary by looking closely at South Korean film culture. My decision to work with a student group (tongari) began thus in part with my desire to encounter a group discourse—as opposed to unrelated individuals’—on cinema in an intimate, focused manner, quite apart from an interest in university students themselves.

Joining a club, however, was not as easy as reading about them in online articles. I did get a few rejections before I received an okay from a tongari that I will call Cinepol at a reputable university in Seoul. I did not, however, consider college rankings in selecting a school. The decision depended largely on, first, whether I could find the contact information either off or online as I had no connections to university students in South Korea prior to my research. I also had a better sense about film clubs in Seoul because the media presence of university film clubs is rather biased towards those in the metropolitan area although regional universities feature in the media as well. The particular university I introduce in this dissertation is a co-ed institution; and while the members represent a markedly heterogeneous population with different tastes, talents, class backgrounds (a range of middle classes), experiences, views on politics, and even generation to a certain extent, they inhabit South Korea as mostly twenty-something cinephiles.

To this group of students, I introduced myself as a graduate student researcher and expressed my desire to become a real member, an “insider,” so to speak. In fact, I specifically

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86 Here, Keathley discusses the American cinephilia of the 1960s-70s.
chose the word insider because I was introduced to the group as an outside guest at the beginning. For both ethical and methodological reasons, I did not want to be a mere observer who would come and go with the collected data in hand. Knowing that friendship and intimacy play an important role in such clubs from my own membership in a university club as an undergraduate student, I wished to develop a genuine relationship to and in the club. My “observant participation” (See Wacquant 2010; Schmuck 2006: 50-51) in this community began in the following way in the fall semester of 2008.

**First impressions**

“You should have come three years earlier” was one of the first words that greeted me when I entered and sat down in the snug and cluttered “club room” (*tongbang*) late in the summer of 2008. They could have shown me a lot more interesting things had I come just so much earlier as three years, Alex, a third year student, added. It was the first day of meeting my “research participants” in person. Being a first-time ethnographer, Alex’s words came upon me like a big bang that silenced all the noise in my brain for a fleeting second. Having arrived early, I had over and over again in my head rehearsed how to go about handing out the consent forms as I roamed about the campus. My imaginary hellos reverberated with the sounds of strings and winds practicing familiar classical music, a rock band where a surprisingly talented vocal sang accompanied by a clamor of instruments, and students playing ballgames in the late summer afternoon. I enjoyed heartily the sounds like a good omen. I, in fact, put a gratifying idea into my head that these university clubs were vibrant and full of excitement. As I discuss below,
however, I was quite in the wrong. I should have gone three years earlier. The same greetings were repeated to me once again later that night on the club’s website.

Conversation drifted and I was not given an explanation on the spot as to how things were more interesting three years ago. A number of students, however, later commented on the lack of vitality among university clubs, which I actually mistook for the fullness thereof especially during my first weeks of research. What I heard most often from the club members was simply that “students these days don’t care for the likes of a college club.” A student whom I will call Director Lee—as I call him to this day—was one of them. We happened to be walking together to an “after-party” (twip’uri), an informal get-together that involves a light meal and drinking after the meetings, when he said:

Our club isn’t what it used to be. In fact, it isn’t just our club that’s going through trying times. Students these days don’t really care for club activities. Clubs are not like how they used to be in the 80’s. These days, the only clubs that survive are the ones that help you either get jobs or make money.  

On the surface, it is easy to put two and two together and connect the passing comments of Alex and Director Lee. It is true that Cinepol could have had more interesting things to show even a few years ago (per Alex) because, as the students report, less and less university students join the likes of a college club (per Lee). The declining popularity of college student clubs must have impacted the activities within Cinepol. They, in fact, have even had contemplated whether or not to disband. As Lee notes, today’s university clubs must provide practical help in order to survive. A film club, however, is no where near a “stock market club” (chusik tongari) or “entrepreneur’s club” (ch’angŏp tongari) that college students are drawn to in recent years. What he means, to use a popular jargon, is that the clubs should be useful for the building of so-called “specs” (résumé) that I discussed in the Introduction. Because of South Korea’s increasingly competitive

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87 For all conversations I could not record or take notes, I kept a daily journal as an additional set of fieldnotes.
job market in virtually all sectors of industries (see U and Pak 2007), each applicant needs to be a prime candidate, better prepared than others. This, in turn, makes many college students obsessed with building specs and self-development arguably above all else in their early 20s. This is indeed, in the words of Junsu, an alumnus, “an age in which belonging to a tongari is a laughable thing.” That many students were particularly keen on the difficult job market and the economy, moreover, reflects the global financial meltdown and the subsequent panic in the stock market in 2008-9 which coincided with my research period. To put it simply, students haven’t got the time to sit around and talk seriously about movies these days.

Alex and Director Lee, however, do not seem to have commented equally on the vanishing tradition of university clubs. What I would like to focus on in the introduction of Cinepol, my ethnographic center, is something that these two students did not share in their equally apologetic words. That is to say, they had two different points of reference in time. Alex, on the one hand, looked back three years in time, a time which he had experienced personally as a member of the club. This was most likely when the club activities were less influenced by the neoliberal turn in the society as the older members of the club at the time would have entered the university in the early 2000s at the latest. I consider three years, however, a rhetorical expression rather than an accurate temporal referent. Director Lee, on the other hand, compared the status quo to the 1980s in his imagination, arguably shaped by hearsays and other forms of learning. The subsequent section will follow their lead and trace the histories that formed the film club of today.
Early university film clubs

Let’s first visit Director Lee with his words that student clubs are no longer the way they used to be in the 1980’s. What he seems to refer to here is specifically the dogmatic and repressive style in which student clubs operated in the past. In a later interview, Lee who entered the university in 2004 said that the atmosphere of accepting the repressive and top-down mode of operation in student clubs has more or less disappeared by now (i.e., 2008-9). The younger generation in the club rejects rigorous (ppakseda, slang) training in film studies. The situation is the same in any other club such as a band, he added. For the reader who is not familiar with South Korean culture, the recognition of seniority is one of the most important organizing principles in familial and social relationships even among children. The difference that Lee speaks of between the 1980s and now as such is most likely the willingness to participate in student groups that demand hard work and complete devotion rather than the activist orientation of the early film clubs as I discuss below.

The semester that I first joined Cinepol, in fact, was the one in which the members decided to reduce their meetings from twice a week to once a week. They had jettisoned the weekly theory seminar, leaving themselves only with the group study meetings where students discuss film(s) chosen by the presenter of the day. Two meetings from each semester, however, were to be spent on learning film language and production in lieu of the abandoned seminars. I also learned that the members in the past used to have homework and quizzes such as doing “shot-by-shot” (shat-bai-shat) analysis, which basically involves the laborious work of dividing scenes/sections of a movie into the unit of single shots and analyzing them before coming to the
As such, it did not surprise me to see occasionally the word curriculum (k’ŏrik’yullôm) on their online discussion boards. In addition to participating in the club activities that amount to taking a full-semester course, dealing with the expectations of senior students must have been taxing to a certain degree. It is quite ironic that the student groups of the past that resisted the repressive military regimes (see Abellmann 1996; Choi C. 1995; Lee N. 2007b) shared a rather comparable style of operation. It would be, however, misleading to suggest that the student groups were on a par with the military regimes as the members spoke of how the club has been able to thrive thanks, in part, to the sacrifices of senior students and alumni who gave their time to give lectures to the junior students. The tradition of having alumni visiting the group study meetings remained in practice even a few years earlier when Lee was a freshman.

Although Cinepol is a film-oriented group today, nearly all student film clubs in the country began as activist bodies that resisted the Chun Doo-hwan administration (1980-88) starting in the early 1980s. Throughout the decade, the most important political actors next to the military had been university students, the leading figures of undongkwŏn (activists; see Lee N. 2007b: 95). This was the time when national student organizations such as the National Students’ Committee (Chonhangnyŏn, est. 1985) and the National University Students’ Committee (Chŏndaehyŏp, est. 1987) were also brought to fruition. These organizations were “portrayed as ‘heroes’ and as ‘the year’s most important persons’ by the mass media” (95).  

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88 An example of a shot-by-shot analysis will be included in chapter 3.

89 The words “‘senior’” (sŏnbae) and “‘junior’” (hubae) do not denote the year in school (e.g., freshman) but are relative terms that indicate people’s relationship to one another.

90 See Lie (1998) on “[the sanctification of the student movement” (39).
It is then worth noting that, Yallahshŏng, the first university film club, was established specifically as an activist student body at Seoul National University (SNU) in 1980, which is about five years earlier than when the national student movement groups were organized. By the spring of 1985, at least thirteen film clubs emerged on university campuses just within Seoul (Chang 1986: 248). It took five years since the establishment of Yallahshŏng before film clubs could emerge on other university campuses because it was only in 1984 that the government simplified the process of organizing student groups from the permit system, which required the government approval, to a simpler registration system (*Cine21*, 24 March 1998). The early university film clubs, along with the Seoul Film Collective (hereafter, Collective) founded by SNU graduates in 1982, led the film activism of the 1980s (An 2001: 1). The major accomplishment of the Collective included, in particular, the publication of *Towards a new cinema* (1983) and *Theory of film activism* (1985), “which became canons among the Korean underground filmmakers” (Park, forthcoming: 45).91 An important concept that was born out of this effort was the so-called “small cinema” (*chagūn yŏnghwα*)，which contested the political legitimacy and authority of 35mm commercial films. Small cinema, produced by 8mm and 16mm cameras, sought to encourage open communication in the politically closed South Korean society (48).

The underground filmmakers, however, were not the only ones who were influenced by small cinema. University students likewise embraced the idea and hosted numerous “small film festivals” across college campuses in Seoul when the majority of the early film clubs were

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91 *Towards a New Cinema* (Seoul: Hangminsα, 1983) and *Theory of Film Activism* (Seoul: Hwada Ch’ulp’ansa, 1985). Both volumes are directly influenced by “Towards a Third Cinema” (1969) written by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino.
established in 1985 (Chang 1986: 248-270). Students, in addition, grappled with the concept of small cinema on their own terms. In “Towards an Open Cinema,” a manifesto written by the members of Sogang Film Community, for instance, the students declared that “film should no longer be confined within a closed system but be open—open to every member of the society and make the society open. In other words, resistant cinema must strengthen solidarity between the users and receivers of the medium while promoting an autonomous consciousness” (256). Certainly influenced by the Collective’s writing in which the concept of small cinema equaled an open one, this document is also suggestive of the emphasis on communal film production that the Collective and Kim Dong-won, the father of Korean independent cinema, have practiced to promote production by and for those who use and watch the medium. Like the underground independent filmmakers, moreover, the subject matters of student films have been focused on social activism. The usual topics included social inequality, unstable university campuses, labor issues, activist movements, women and gender, and problems in agricultural regions such as the lack of brides. For student filmmakers, to borrow the words of the members of Nue at Ehwa Womans University (The Ehwa Weekly, 26 August 1985), small cinema meant moving the camera’s angle to a lower place so they can look at the society from the bottom where people work (260).

What is intriguing, then, is that there is no vestige of the activist spirit that was once so strong left in today’s film clubs. A simple answer to this curiosity is the end of the military regimes and the subsequent democratization of South Korea in the 1990s (see Kim 2003). Film

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92 The primary sources of film clubs are republished in Chang (1986).

93 Sŏgang Yŏnghwa Kongdongch’e at Sogang University.

94 This was most likely written in 1985. The concept of “open” cinema is more prominent in Toward a New Cinema which was published in 1983 than in the second volume published in 1985 (Park, 48).
scholar Kim Soyoung notices the drastic changes in this vein that “the quasi-religious energy of the 1980s Korean student movement—in fact a kind of youth culture—is hardly detectable on 1990s streets and campuses” while the “desire for cinema has become a distinctive feature of youth culture since the early 1990s” (2005: 81-2). I have likewise seen a number of special features on the thriving university film culture in magazines of the 1990s. For Kim, the replacement of the social and political monthlies by Cine21, a popular film magazine, on the newsstands in the 1990s is symptomatic of this cultural change (83). There was indeed no longer the need to oppose the government for open communication while the focus of activism evolved and expanded into different areas such as human rights of ethnic minorities. The 386-generation, namely those who were in their 30s, attended universities in the 80s, and were born in the 60s, also largely moved away from activism and into the government and policy-making positions. By the time students entered universities in the 2000s, the 386-generation bemoaned the general lack of political interests in youth who had freely received the political freedom that the previous generation had won.

With the political shift in mind, however, I hypothesize that the film-oriented club that Alex had heard about and remembers of the 1990s and 2000s makes better sense if we also consider continuity rather than rupture from the 1980s (see Kang 2009; Kim 2010; Nam 2009). I would say, in other words, that university film clubs of the 1980s did not focus singularly on activism but concerned themselves also with the questions of cinema, which is arguably the cinephilic root of film clubs of today. According to Young-a Park, the small/open cinema

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95 See, for example, Aujourd’hui (vols. 1, 2, 2/1, 2/2, 2/3, 2/4); Cine House (vol. 1); Cine21 (vols. 9, 87, 143); Internet (vol.3); News People (vol.5/45); and Newsmaker (vol. 524).

96 These works examine historical and social continuities despite the apparent ruptures caused by regime changes in South Korea.
movement in its early stage likewise involved not only those committed to social activism but also the art film crowd who were the regulars at the German and French Cultural Centers although it did not continue for long as such (Forthcoming, 49). Park notes that, by the mid-1980s, the film activist circuit became radicalized and “much more intolerant of those who were not vocally leftist and nationalistic” (50). Those who were involved with the German Cultural Center, for instance, were condemned as collaborators of the German fascist-imperialists (50).

I propose, in contrast, that university film clubs even in their devotion to small cinema did not lose their focus on film itself as opposed to the activist circuits where cinema was beneath the theater, the privileged art of minjung (mass) (see Choi 1995). Yŏnghwap’ae,97 the film group at Yonsei University, for example, stated their goal of anchoring their focus on the idiosyncrasies of the film medium as an agent of historical progress (Chang 1986: 258). In “Towards the Open Cinema,” the Sogang University students also rejected the idea of using film merely as a tool for social movement, a carrier of ideological messages (255). They called instead for new languages and forms of film—“the art of light”—to bring light into society where truth has been covered up by darkness (256). The members of Nue at the Ewha campus likewise called for innovative uses of film language in their criticism of small cinema. The films they favored, in this way, took steps beyond the direct representation of the underprivileged by using creativity and abstraction that undo the illusions spoon-fed by commercial films (263-4). That film clubs studied critical and film theories from the beginning98 is, in fact, not so surprising.

In choosing the power of imagination over realism, their vision of political potential in the viewer’s active participation in the meaning-making process perhaps more so than in filmmaking

97 Today, Yŏnghwap’ae operates under the name of Prometheus.

98 These clubs included but were not limited to Sonagi (est. 1985) at Kyung Hee University and Tolpit (est. 1983) at Korea University.
itself hints amply at Brecht, for instance. The definition of small cinema among university students as such seems to have transcended the materiality of 8mm or 16mm cameras or even subject matter.

Film clubs across university campuses, furthermore, called the practicality of small cinema into question. According to a survey that Ullim of Hanguk University of Foreign Studies conducted during their small film festival (May 9-11, 1985), even those who were nominal supporters of small cinema did not prefer to watch small cinema pieces. When given the option of choosing only one from *Gone with the Wind* (US), *Indiana Jones* (US), *L’eclisse* (Italy/France), *Yol* (Turkey), *Easy Rider* (New American), and three other films (most likely small cinema), a 100 percent out of 170 participants selected the first two Hollywood films (267-8). The outcome did not surprise the members of Ullim. University students found small cinema ineffective not necessarily because of the subject matter. As the members of Nue have pointed out, it was easy for small cinema to be overly dark or otherwise dull as audiovisual texts.

In addition to their concern for the film medium, film clubs must have attracted students with mixed tastes and intentions as in the case of the activist circuit that Park describes. It was, in fact, not unheard of for some of the small film festival programs to include cinephilic canons such as *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) and *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Alain Resnais, 1959). As early as 1988, moreover, Light and Sound99 of Hongik University championed through the critical gaze of other film clubs for their unabashed leaning towards art film (Cine21 27 June 1995: 24). This was indeed a “radical” move as activism-oriented film clubs such as T’ō at Hanyang University (est. 1989) and Yŏngsawi at Soongsil University (est. 1990) continued to organize on university campuses into the 1990s.

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99 Pit ūi Sori.
As such, I have discovered an equal interest in both activism and film in the writings of the early university clubs, a discovery that makes me hesitate to insert university film clubs singularly into the history of film activism in South Korea. The media narratives of film club histories likewise reflect the division between film activism and university film clubs. The common story in these narratives, on the one hand, is that most film clubs began as activist groups but went through changes into the 1990s. Of particular interest is that in no interviews of the past and present members of film clubs in articles dating from 1995 to 2006 is there any mention of names such as that of Kim Dong-won. While Kim himself is not of the tongari (club) generation, I had expected to see Kim in their narratives as arguably the most important individual in film activism.

The names I came across instead were those of the founding and early members of the East-West Film Society (Tongsŏ Yŏnghwa Yŏn’guhoe; EWFS). The EWFS was organized mostly by young Korean men who had been regular visitors of the German Cultural Center in the late 1970s. Film critic Chŏn Ch’anil recollects that the EWFS was founded with the support of the Center when the popularity of New German Cinema was at its height around the world in the 1970s (Newsmaker 22 May 2003: 60-1). If the history of film activism cites Yallahşŏng of SNU along with the Seoul Film Collective in its early stage (An 2001: 1), Chŏn’s narrative differs as in the following:

East-West, oriented towards the study of theory and criticism, thrived even before the emergence of film tongari on university campuses. In retrospect, it was a pioneering film society that contributed greatly to the “film wave” that hit university campuses hard later on. That is, along with the production and practice (silch ‘ŏn)-oriented Yallahşŏng […]

100 At the National Library, I retrieved fifteen journal and magazine articles for the keywords “Yallahşŏng” (the name of the first film club at SNU) and “yŏnghwa tongari” (film club). These include Aujourd’hui (vols. 1, 2, 2/1, 2/2, 2/3, 2/4); Cine House (vol. 1); Cine21 (vols. 9, 87, 143); Internet (vol. 3); News People (vol. 5/45); Newsmaker (vol. 524); and Video Plus (vols. 2, 84).
The Collective, first of all, is clearly absent in his narrative. While there are stories of those who led a “double life” of going back and forth between the activist and art film crowds (Park, forthcoming: 43-4), the way in which Chŏn remembers the past is noteworthy in that activism (undong) is largely absent and rephrased or downplayed as practice (silch’ŏn). I do not suggest, however, that history of film activism is lost on the film critic as he lived through the time as a member of the 386-generation (he entered university in 1981). That he writes about his frequent visits to the French Cultural Center and joining the EWFS is itself of significance as practically no university student of the time could escape or overlook activism. Rather than dismissing Chŏn’s narrative as lacking or even bourgeois, however, it would be productive to read it as one possible way of remembering the time.

In regard to the 1990s, I was not able to interview anyone among the alumni of Cinepol who attended the university in the 1990s to ask about the changes that took place after the political shift. I was, however, fortunate to listen to an account of a 386-generation filmmaker’s own disillusionment in radical film activism that he felt in the 1990s at a discussion session during the Friends Film Festival at Seoul Art Cinema. The “friend” of the cinamatheque who talked about the 1990s was Kim Ji-woon, whose selection for the festival this year was Boy Meets Girl, a 1984 French film about two jilted youngsters never finding happiness by Leos Carax. When the programmer of the cinamatheque asked how Kim came to watch the film for the first time, he told the audience as follows.

I saw it for the first time when I went to Myŏngdong to rent a laser disk. I did not know anything about the movie then. It was in the 90s. I saw its poster put up next to the poster of Stranger than Paradise [1984]. I was so struck by that still shot. There must be many in the audience who saw the film for the first time today. In any case, I thought the film was beautiful—it’s a sad love story—although I really did not understand the film when I watched it for the first time. Among those who

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101 January 29 to March 1, 2009.

102 Stranger than Paradise (Jim Jarmusch, 1984).
went to college in the 80s, those who were concerned about filmmaking considered cinema as a political tool. We had films like *Yol* [1982]; *Missing* [1982]; and *The Tin Drum* [1979]. However, *Boy Meets Girl* [1984] expressed emotions of a private nature, carrying the sensibility of isolation and separation. When everyone believed that cinema must prosecute social ills, a very private film turned up. In this movie, I realized that democratic shots and horizontal movements were able to capture the gaze of desire and longing. Wasn’t *Boy Meets Girl* the future of cinema for those who had delicate sensibilities, those who were unable to be overt and blatant?

It must have been ironic for Kim, a 386-generation, to find an alternative to political film precisely in this 1984 piece. The “democratic shots” and “horizontal movements” that he found in *Boy Meets Girl* likewise had been important cinematic tropes to the cinephiles of the 1980s, not unlike how college students lowered the camera’s angle to where the working class labored. In his memoir, film critic Kim Yŏngjin (2007) recalls similarly of an occasion when he eavesdropped on the conversation between Park Chan-wook and a junior student during his college days at Sogang University. The words that the critic overheard echo the filmmaker’s fascination with the camera movement. Park is remembered to have said, “I watched Jean-Luc Godard’s *Contempt* [1963] yesterday and finally got the anti-bourgeois camera style. The camera moved horizontally…” (97). Young cinephiles of the 1980s as such had been concerned with the poetics of representation beyond the subject matter in film even as a political medium. I would put forward, in this regard, that the political focus of cinephiles moved gradually from that of the content to the form—film as an artistic medium with a particular signification system more often than an “ideological apparatus” (Baudry 1974-5)—throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. The rigorous study of the formal system of film that must have continued from the early days of film clubs (rather than as a part of the sudden “changes” in the 1990s), moreover, is perhaps what Alex seems to have referred to as “more interesting things” from three years ago.

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103 *Yol* (Serif Gören and Yilmaz Güney, 1982); *Missing* (Costa-Gavras, 1982); and *The Tin Drum* (Volker Schlöndorff, 1979).
In the PC: cinema as everyday practice

The 1990s, at the same time, saw a dramatic change in the technological realm that shaped what I would describe as cinema as everyday practice among today’s cinephiles. The new development that brought perhaps a greater impact on the cinephilic culture in South Korea than democratization was arguably the invention of the World Wide Web in August 1990 (see O’Regan 2008: 185-8). Of course, digital communication between computers existed globally prior to the 1990s. The general public (beyond governments and universities), in particular, accessed the cyberspace through the “BBS” (bulletin board system) that functioned as a public forum in which dial-up users leave and retrieve messages (see Kajan 2002: 57; Floridi 1999: 75; on the South Korean case, see Cho 2011).

This is, however, not to say that the introduction of the World Wide Web brought an immediate end to the BBS. Many continued to use the BBS at least until the late 1990s. In South Korea, too, about a hundred BBSs such as Chollian and Hitel were in operation by the late 1980s (see Yi 2002: 14). What is striking about South Korea’s case is the rapid increase in the numbers of users of the so-called “PC communications” (PC t’ongsin), a term that is often used synonymously with the BBS. By 1994, the number of the PC communications users surpassed 300,000 in South Korea. This was the same year when the number of AOL (America Online) users reached a million since the company was listed on NASDAQ in 1992. Yi Ch’ŏlmin, a film columnist who writes on the Internet, remarks that these numbers are significant as each amounted to the population of a small/medium city in the respective country (2002: 18-9). To put this in another way, the number of South Korean PC communications users rivaled that of AOL, arguably the most influential Internet service provider in the world at the time.
When the text-based BBS became outmoded by the invention of the World Wide Web, or simply the Web, the critical mass of South Koreans who were already using the Internet at large once again quickly embraced the new technology. The Web, to note, is only one of the ways of organizing cyberspace but nonetheless remains the most popular globally as it incorporates computing languages that allow unrestricted audiovisual communication. \(^{104}\) Film critic Kim Soyoung, as I have mentioned once above, observed the change in South Korean youth when the political weeklies were replaced by film magazines at the newsstands in the early 1990s. She has aptly pointed out that it was precisely “popular” culture, which began to differentiate itself from “mass” culture (meant for the public rather than consumers), that interpellated youth into consumers at the time (2000: 221-2).

In the late 1990s and into the 2000s, moreover, youth, I would argue, evolved into a particular type of consumers, thanks to these innovations in computing technology. That is to say, youth did not merely consume popular culture but did so often through the Internet. Film magazines, too, disappeared one by one from the newsstands while many turned to online sources for information on movies (e.g., *Kino*, 1995-2003; *Road Show*, 1989-2003). Most recently, *Film2.0* and *Screen* discontinued publication in 2009 and 2010 respectively, leaving only a few including *Cine21* and *Movieweek* in business.

Based on the 2010 estimate, South Korea has among the highest penetration of Internet users per population at 81.1 %, in the same ballpark as countries in the Nordic region (Iceland, 97.6 %; Norway, 94.8 %; Sweden, 92.5 %), U.S. (77.3 %), and Japan (78.2 %). \(^{105}\) In terms of broadband (high speed) subscription (2007 stats), South Korea ranked second only to

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\(^{104}\) These include languages such as HTML, JavaScript, or Action Script (flash) (cf. BBS; Gopher). See Floridi (1999: 76-9).

\(^{105}\) Internet World Stats. http://www.internetworldstats.com
Netherlands at 27.4 % (Netherlands, 32.8 %; Sweden, 27.2 %; U.S., 21.9 %; Japan, 21.1 %). The last set of statistics is of particular significance here because South Korean youth depend on broadband connectivity for their popular culture consumption as I discuss further below. The broadband connection is used, in particular, for file sharing and purchase via “webhards” (online storage)\(^{106}\) and/or “P2P” (peer-to-peer) software in addition to using legal VOD (video on demand) services. A peer-to-peer network, simply put, requires its participants to share a part of their own hardware resources such as storage capacity in order to be able to share files (see Buford and Yu 2010: 3-7). VOD services, moreover, have become more common in recent years\(^{107}\) although it is yet uncertain as to how an increase in VOD services would result in the use of illegal downloading.

The earliest P2P site in South Korea was Soribada which began providing services for searching and downloading mp3 (music) files in 2000. The advantage of webhards, which followed as late as in 2002, was that, unlike the mp3 format, there was no restriction as to which format the user uploads or downloads through their P2P programs. In other words, it became possible to share high definition movie files (often around or larger than 1.4 gigabytes) with anonymous others. In 2008, when the controversy around the ethical use of webhards was at its height in South Korea, the number of subscribers of major webhard companies reached 23.4 million, about the half of the national population (\textit{Dong-A Ilbo}, 18 June 2008). Many of the young cinephiles I met in Cinepol were subscribers to such webhard or P2P services. In this particular sense, the club members whose practices can be seen as rather exclusive comprise much more than just a niche group.

\(^{106}\) Anonymous others can upload and download files to and from the webhards.

\(^{107}\) \textit{Cine21}, for instance, has changed the layout of their website in 2011 to give more prominence to its VOD services. Readers have responded with complaints of the apparent shift in the focus of their business.
Piracy is indeed a serious issue not only in the film and media industries (see Xu 2007: 25-45) but also among the club members themselves. The case I would like to make here, however, is not of the ethics but of a particular change that the introduction of Internet has brought to the cinephilic culture. In short, the Internet has made cinema an everyday practice—something that is as private as a personal computer—for youth. In my reference to everydayness, however, I mean more than how cinema is a part of the ordinary daily life of college students. I use the term everyday vis-à-vis how cinema was marked by a communal event in the early years of film (see Hansen 1991). Early film audiences were comparable to “well behaved” students who not only watched the screen but listened to the “lecturers” during the silent era (1894-1929) (59). In the darkness, audiences also experienced diversity above class and ethnic divides as the “nickelodeons offered easy access and a space apart, an escape from overcrowded tenements and sweatshop labor, a reprieve from the time discipline of urban-industrial life” (61). The audience in the theater thus became a collective unit in a particular physical space and time. This is different from, for instance, the imagined collectivity of today’s film audiences who watch movies alone on a laptop around the world.

A part of the reason why cinema had to be a communal practice—in real time and place—was because “most movies were, in a very real sense, rare” (Ray in Keathley 2006: 20, original italics). The cinephile made an effort to see films because films—the ones we take for granted on DVDs today such as Meet Me in St. Louis—might never come back to town again (20). So, just as a movie came to one’s town, museum, or school, the cinephiles themselves had to go where they could watch the movie (20). The nexus between cinema’s rarity and communality as such is what made the cinephilic experience an “event,” taking place as a memorable time as Christian Keathley writes as follows.
Even the most banal activities—the journey to the theater, standing in line for a ticket, where one went for dinner or a drink afterward—were intensified by their proximity to the movie itself, and they became threads that made up one’s tangled memories of the film experience. Films thus existed for people as events, but not in the commercial, promotional sense of that term. Rather, as Thomas Elsaesser has written, seeing movies … became, like other aspects of our lives, “events that have happened to us, experiences that are inalienably ours,” ones that we revisit in our memory and make up who we are. (2006: 20-1, original italics)

The case in South Korea has been no different. Chŏng Chonghwa, a well known film memorabilia collector and researcher, recalls his student days when he had to wait a full hundred days to watch La Strada (Federico Fellini, 1954) in Seoul because he missed its first release in April 19, 1958 (2006: 63). Almost twenty years later in 1977, Winter Woman (Kyŏul Yŏja, Kim Hosŏn), the greatest hit of the time that ran for half a year, still had only thirteen screens nationwide. Those who wanted to purchase tickets made newspaper headlines that reported “an unusual scene of long trail of people standing in lines around the Chongno district on weekends and holidays” (Chi and Shin 2009: 7). Not much changed into the early 1980s. Film critic Kim Yŏngjin remembers the time as when one rarely got to watch “good films” (choŭn yŏnghwa) for the lack of opportunities and places. The South Korean government, on top this, restricted the number of foreign film imports while television broadcasting was largely limited to reruns of old movies (2007: 70). Although cinema underwent great changes since its early days, its peculiarity as an event, a rarity, remained an essential part of the cinematic experience for a long time until the introduction of the home video, which, in South Korea, became popularized in the second half of the 1980s.  

To be precise, the VHS format, even as it brought movies into domestic space, appears to have simultaneously facilitated cinema’s capacity as an event and rarity at least among the

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108 A major commercial district enclosed by five Chosŏn period palaces.

109 This is one of the key words in chapter 3 although the particular meaning that Kim suggests is unspecified.

110 E.g., from silent “exhibitionist” film to classical narrative cinema (Hansen 1991: 34).
cinephiles of the early 1990s.\textsuperscript{111} “Yŏnghwa Konggan (cinema space) 1895,” the first cinemateque in South Korea established in 1989 by a group of cinephiles in their early to mid-twenties, was in fact a videotheque that screened videotaped copies of films including those commercially unavailable as VHS (\textit{Cine21}, 18 August 1998; 30 May 2011).\textsuperscript{112} Cine-clubs (\textit{sinekŭllŏp}) of this time, one of which became Seoul Art Cinema of today, likewise relied on videotapes for screening and discussion until they replaced the VHS with film by the late 1990s when collecting videotapes became much easier than before.\textsuperscript{113} The relative ease of acquiring videotapes, especially of the copies of rare classical, art, and banned films, however, is better considered with a grain of salt as a minor subculture within the VHS culture of the 1990s at large.

Junsu, the oldest of the club members I met who entered the university in 2001, for instance, recalled how he used to go to a store in his neighborhood that traded pirated copies of Japanese movies and animation in his high school days. To my surprise, this store was not a video rental shop. Upon asking, Junsu could not remember what these stores were called except that they specialized in making and selling illegal copies of movies and video games. We got to talking about these stores as we chatted about his cinephilic journey which began with \textit{Edward Scissorhands} (Tim Burton, 1990) which he watched on television without subtitles as a second grader in Boston where he had followed his father on a business trip. His interest in movies, however, dwindled as the years went on until one day when he watched Iwai Shunji’s \textit{Love}

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\textsuperscript{111} In terms of production, the popularity of the VHS among university film clubs was short-lived as it quickly became popularized (and thus commonplace) among consumers and community educators by the mid-1990s while students at first took advantage of the video as a political medium in the late 1980s (\textit{Cine21}, 24 March 1998: 24). Also around 1993, so-called “video rooms” became popular in university towns and other areas with concentrated student populations (\textit{Cine21}, 27 June 1995: 26).

\textsuperscript{112} \url{http://www.hani.co.kr/c21/data/L980803/1qb08302.html}; \url{http://www.cine21.com/do/article/article/typeDispatcher?mag_id=66188l}

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Letter (1995)—a film that “took his breath away”—as a freshman in high school. I asked him whether watching Love Letter brought any changes to his movie habits, such as reading Cine21—an expectable answer considering the popularity of film magazines. He answered me, instead, using an interesting expression that he began looking for movies “like an expert” (chŏnmunjŏgŭro) after watching the film. When asked to explain what he meant by an expert, he quickly retracted his words with a smile and explained that he began looking for the “copies.” While I, too, would not take the word expert at face value, it nonetheless seems to signify a kind of difference in spectatorship that Junsu intended to convey albeit carelessly. He did not, in effect, welcome the lift on the ban on Japanese films, a gradual process that began in the late 1998. For him, the sense of loss of his imaginary ownership of Japanese films (he said they were “chŏman ū kŏt” or “only my things”) was greater than the ease of acquisition. A part of him thus wished that his favorites could remain rarities. It is in this sense that I have suggested above that cinephiles participated in the VHS culture of the 1990s as minorities. Movies, even with the videotapes to watch at home, arguably retained the quality of being an “event” in a manner similar to what Keathley described above.

Since the introduction of home videos, I would propose that it is DVDs, invented in 1995 and commercialized in 1997 (see Taylor, Crawford and Johnson 2006: 2.1-2.34), that further undermined cinema’s existence as events as the new technology brought home the higher definition and longer-lasting supply of movies than the videotapes. In the United States, DVD circulation amplified quickly as companies such as Netflix¹¹⁵ began to offer a convenient home delivery service while public libraries made DVDs available for loan. In South Korea, DVDs

¹¹⁴ See Choi (2010: 3-4) for the influence of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945) on popular culture in South Korea; see Ahn (2011: 68-9) for the role of film festivals in cultural exchanges between Japan and Korea.

¹¹⁵ Netflix was established in 1998 (Falton and Thompson 2009: 275).
seem to have circulated as frequently as so-called “ripped” digital copies. DVDs and digital copies (which can be transacted online) certainly share many things in common such as that make the cinephilic experience less of an event as described above. I would suggest, however, that there is a considerable difference between how the two impact the cinephilic practice due to the materiality of DVDs and the lack thereof in the digital copies.

That is to say, to return to the members of Cinepol, viewing not to mention purchasing DVDs is simply costly for most students without regular incomes. Young-a Park (forthcoming) has aptly analyzed the classed nature of the cinephilic practice with an example of a “Mrs. Kang,” a Pusan local, whom she met at the Pusan International Film Festival as follows.

Mrs. Kang’s identity as a “cinephile” would not have been sustained without the support of her husband, a well-established architect. In addition to their generously agreeing to a late night interview with a stranger, they invited me to visit their suburban home with an ocean view. In 2001, when DVD players and software were still considered pricy markers of status, they had a Philips DVD player for which they paid approximately 670 U.S. dollars. They said that they chose [that] player over a Samsung DVD player that was half the price so that they could watch movies with different regional codes ordered over amazon.com. They had an extensive DVD collection, which I estimated cost them at least several thousand dollars. (203)

Park explains that the sense of being left out of the cultural scene compared to Seoul had also encouraged the Kangs, residents in Pusan (a port city in the south), to accumulate a private collection. This, however, is not typical of college-age cinephiles regardless of their location of origin or current residence. Although there are members of Cinepol who collect DVDs and/or frequent art houses more often than others, I would say that class is arguably a secondary factor that influences their love of film (cf. Bourdieu 1998 [1984]). The club itself is composed of members who seemed to have come from various ranges of middle classes that most of the members would identify themselves with the predicaments of the 88-manwŏn generation that I

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116 Viewing a DVD at a “DVD theater” can be more costly than watching a move at a regular theater in South Korea.
have discussed previously.\textsuperscript{117} Nor is class exclusively decisive in letting them into a prestigious university in Seoul.

Many of the club members as students rather depend greatly on the online resources to the point that there is a type of rupture—although it is not a clean and complete one—in the cinephilic practices because of the Internet and personal computers. If the DVDs in its materiality entered the home in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, digital copies more recently have entered the PC, a space that is more private and intimate than the domestic space—the living room, for instance—for the youth. In this sense, digitalized film in their computers is the everyday practice through which cinephiles today accumulate a vast amount of viewing and knowledge in film. Film, in other words, is less of an event, a rarity. While I only speak of relative difference between digital copies and film as other portable commodities, it is true that for many of the club members online is the most expedient place to get movies.\textsuperscript{118} One of the most salient characteristics of the members of Cinepol as such is the enormous number of films that they have watched. Moreover, as will be discussed in chapter 3 in detail, not only have they watched many, but they have watched them carefully. The near encyclopedic knowledge of film is possible precisely because they have easy and inexpensive access to digital film files that they can go back to time and again. According to the students, the most popular place to find films is the “webhard” that I have introduced above. Not a few of these webhards are run as “cafes” or “clubs” (online membership communities) that catalogue and manage films by region, period,

\textsuperscript{117} I refrained from or remained careful about learning about each member’s family or personal history since the research was on the club itself as a unit rather than each member as individuals.

\textsuperscript{118} I use DVD as a point of comparison to digital copies to highlight the difference even among the latest of formats of movies. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to fully account for all of the home-friendly (to a certain extent) formats including not only an obvious example such as VHS but also the 35mm film prints for the film collectors of both the past and present (I have heard a person talking about how he actually used to watch movie reels at home).
and directors. They are organized indeed like small film libraries as the students A and B told me about their attachment to the online resources.

A: Let me tell you for real. Occasionally, those who actually have the films [i.e., files in their hardware] move to another portal site without giving any notice because of the crackdowns. Then, it’s really …

B: Like the whole world is collapsing in on me.

A: Precisely. It is as if a library that I go to everyday disappears overnight. You know, I used to share my daily life there, and it vanishes into the thin air all of a sudden. I feel abandoned. It wrecks my everyday life.

B: [Jokingly] Stop romanticizing.

The films that the club members watch are not limited to Hollywood or South Korean blockbusters. Although there is a degree of difference between each member, the members are, in general, knowledgeable in a wide variety of films including classics, recent but rare art house films, and independent shorts.\(^{119}\) The utility of the webhard is such that another member, for instance, said that he was able to watch about three hundred movies in his freshman year alone—after years of film abstinence spent studying for the college entrance exam.

For the cinephiles who especially nurse the dream of becoming a filmmaker at least once in their lives, the issue of downloading was nevertheless a grave matter and there was a period when the club members had a heated discussion on the topic. One result of their discussion manifested in their decision to use films only from the 1990s for their group study meetings in the spring semester of 2009 since those are the easiest to obtain as legal DVD copies, the legality of which they also discussed for the purposes of the group meetings. All of them who confessed to downloading, likewise, shared their own guidelines and principles with me. Many said that they would not download movies that are currently playing at theaters while some also said that they limit themselves to classical films that are not easily obtainable even as DVDs, which amazingly are available often as ripped copies online. Their digital viewing practices, moreover,

\(^{119}\) I know that the club members also watch animations, but they are less, if at all, talked about in the group as a whole.
do not necessarily mean the end of the communal spectatorship for them. In fact, students like A and B go to theaters arguably a great deal more often than the regular public.

The digital spectatorship, however, is not merely an economically motivated practice. Many, although not all, of the club members also commented on how they appreciated and saw the benefits of watching movies on their laptops—the leisure to stop, skip, and repeat that really rewrites the text—that changed their viewing habits for good. A student, whom I call Kim-gun, for one, said that he likes taking breaks\textsuperscript{120} when he watches movies now on his laptop. Unlike in the theater where he is forced to pay “more than enough” attention, which for some is the pleasurable part of watching a movie, the peripheral vision of computer monitors, like taking breaks, makes him more objective and detached as a viewer. Influenced by Laura Mulvey’s recent work, \textit{Death 24x a Second} (2006),\textsuperscript{121} he argued for the diversification of the material conditions of watching film for such reasons quite apart from the economic question that propels the development of services such as VOD and paid downloading.\textsuperscript{122}

This new mode of spectatorship, to put it differently, brings these “techno-subjects” (see Hayles 2002) a sense of “sovereignty,” which is a word that Director Lee used when he described to me a conversation that he had with Kim about laptop viewing. Sovereignty in Kim’s case would be to have the freedom to let the extracinematic intrude into his everyday laptop viewing experience. The sense of empowerment, of course, is not unique to watching movies on a laptop. In his discussion of the distracted and fragmented nature of VCR

\textsuperscript{120}He did not specify what he does when he takes breaks; but his point, I gather, is that his breaks gives him enough time or distance from the film in such a way that he is able to watch the film more objectively.

\textsuperscript{121}The title of the dissertation makes reference to the kind of close reading of the text enabled by everyday technology that Mulvey describes in her book. The quote, however, is also a citation of Godard’s famous dictum that “The cinema is truth 24 frames per second.”

\textsuperscript{122}See also Ng (2010) for a philosophical treatise on the digital revolution in spectatorship.
spectatorship (as in the case of television), Timothy Corrigan highlights the power that one holds in front of the television screen as follows.

When [a] movie is viewed through a VCR, it is even more so a selected experience and subject to the choices and decisions of the spectator—to stop it, to replay parts of it, to speed through sections of it. With the viewing of a VCR film, in short, the spectator gains an unprecedented power to appropriate a movie text that the viewer can then relinquish him- or herself to. (1991: 28, original italics)

Similar to the cinephiles in front of their laptops, it is no mystery that the VCR viewer gains power as he or she manipulates the movie text playing in the television screen with the remote control. There is, on the other hand, a profound difference between the type of power given to the video viewer that Corrigan describes and the sense of sovereignty that the club members speak of. With videos, as Corrigan notes, one “glances” rather than “gazes” at the screen, watching movies “across the distractions” (16, 27-8). The cinephile, however, does gaze at the screen especially in the sense of what Mulvey, in the work cited above, calls an interactive spectatorship that “brings with it pleasures reminiscent of the processes of textual analysis” (27-8). According to Mulvey, the interactive spectatorship has been made possible particularly as “cinema’s stillness, a projected film’s best-kept secret” (22) is now made come out in the open with the digital revolution. In this manner, there is much more to the act of the club members who stop, repeat, and fast-forward movies on their laptops at their leisure although it is perfectly possible that the cinephile chooses to be a careless viewer, if s/he so wishes. Even the peripheral vision experienced in the way that Kim-gun appreciates is noteworthy, in other words, because he associates it with an objective and analytical vision rather than a distracted living room spectatorship.

The notion of sovereignty as the club members use is interesting as the spectator, particularly in classical screen theories, is considered subordinate to the text in which “we ‘forget ourselves’ in our interest in another’s vision of the world” (Sobchack 1992: 276; see Metz 1982: 
89-98; Baudry 1974-5). In the words of Jean-Pierre Oudart, cinema indeed channels “a real terrorism of the sign … when signification actually penetrates the spectator as a *sovereign speech*, solitary and without echo” (1977-8: 43, my italics). Among the club members like Lee and Kim, however, sovereignty is given instead to the viewer that signification happens only as they watch and make meaning. Their relationship to cinema is, in this way, not defined or conditioned by the text but by the interactive give-and-take they perform or practice with the text. For some of the members, the sense of sovereignty comes with ability to see the “big picture” of each frame in each shot precisely and ironically because they are looking at a small screen. Shinu commented, in this vein, on how, surprising even to himself, he liked watching movies on his laptop because his eyes grasp the picture in its entirety so much more easily than on the big screen, an idea that Lee also shared although he said that there must be a difference between watching by lights and by pixels. A number of students also commented similarly on the ability to skip forward or backward by ten seconds, a signature function of “Gom Player,” a popular South Korean media software.\(^{123}\) For them, this ability is the real difference in experience that the new technology has brought to their fingertips. Unlike VHS or DVD, this particular software makes it easy to control not only the plot time but also the film’s representation (as a digital copy of varying qualities) by altering speed, redesigning sound, and even using basic Photoshop functions although I doubt that the members would try all of these functions with all of the movies they watch.

It is true that for some members, the privileges of watching a movie on one’s laptop are not a matter of sovereignty but a deplorable act that disrespects the artist. The ability to control and re-write the text nonetheless seems to be a favorable tool for the club members who are close

\(^{123}\) Recently, an increasing number of online media players, including Youtube, feature similar functions (basic ones such as skipping, resizing, etc.).
readers of film, rather like the photographer in *Blow Up* (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) who unveils the hidden truth in a (photographic) text by manipulating the text over and over again. What separates the members of Cinepol from the majority of downloaders who consume film as a disposable digital good is precisely the pleasure they derive from textual analysis that I discuss in the next chapter.
PART II

A CLOSE LOOK AT COSMOPOLITAN CINEPHILIA

In chapters 3 and 4, I look at the everyday talk—a micro view—of the members of Cinepol as a window on their cinephilic culture. This close look, on the one hand, will show two distinct ways in which the club members approach film: close textual reading (chapter 3) and (as a student calls it) “pure” appreciation without necessarily engaging in analysis (chapter 4).

Important to note is that these chapters do not mean to move chronologically as if the club’s practice evolved from analysis-oriented to analysis-free. I would say that both are in practice concomitantly, however, arguably as a response to the decades-long devotion to theory-driven practice among South Korean cinephiles. Most of today’s cinephiles appreciate textual analysis as long as it allows room for personal experience, which I discuss in terms of affective cinephilia. The club members, in this way, do not necessarily contradict themselves when they say that they enjoy analyzing film at the same time as they appreciate the intimate and personal experience of film. In short, affective cinephilia thus complements the lack of means of addressing the cinephile’s relationship to film in doing close textual analysis.

These chapters participate also in the larger conversation about the putative cultural hegemony of the West implicated in the transnational circulation of cultural texts. While I do not disregard the history of colonialism, my position is that using American scholarship and watching Western art films do not have to reproduce or sustain the unequal power relationship between the West and the Rest. I argue instead that the club activities—in making American scholarship their own as well as appreciating movies unattached from the desire for a particular Western modernity—point to the shifted/shifting power relationship between the West the Rest.
Chapter Three

The Bordwell Regime:124 “A Different Kind of Fun”

Bordwell is a classicist, in some ways film studies’ Voltaire: prolific, brilliant, and combative. Not surprisingly, he uses the words “Baroque,” “Mannerist,” and “rococo” as pejoratives and generally denounces “the arid heights of Theory.” … Like all classicists, Bordwell admires the Baconian empirical model of hypotheses-tested-against-evidence, and he has scrupulously applied its exacting standards to himself. “There comes a point,” he has insisted, “where a theoretical formulation must not simply cite presuppositions and select privileged instances but test itself against a body of detailed evidence.”125

In the previous chapter, I discussed how the Internet technology figures as one of the dominant ways through which the young generation of cinephiles accumulates a great amount of film viewing as an ordinary part of their everyday life. This chapter, in turn, examines what the members of Cinepol actually do as a group with all the movies they watch. The particular activity that I will focus on is what the members call the “structural analysis” (kujojuûijôk punsôk) of film, the most central practice of Cinepol. It is, however, not to be confused with an Althusserian type of structural criticism that reveals the roots of social ills. The club members instead strictly police their talk and writings on film to be primarily about film’s formal (i.e., structural) qualities. They acquire the necessary cineliteracy through Film Art: An Introduction (hereafter, Film Art), a popular film textbook written by the American film scholars David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. As such, I approach Cinepol not merely as a hobby club but more significantly as a speech community in which a group of people share a common language and produce a collective discourse, even as their talk is by no means unitary or homogeneous.


I situate the club’s use of *Film Art* in what film scholar Robert B. Ray (2001) calls the “Bordwell regime,” a sphere of influence of Bordwell’s empirical scholarship that rejects the totalizing tendency of what he calls the “grand theory” in film studies that expose the politics of cinematic vision informed largely by psychoanalysis, semiotics, and feminist film studies (Bordwell 1966). The heavy use of Bordwellian approach to cinema that privileges the film text, however, is not unique to Cinepol as this regime of knowledge has had its share of influence since the time of so-called the first generation film students of the 1980s. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the club operates in the Bordwell regime today by examining a group study meeting (*sŭt’ŏdi*) on *Children of Men* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006) as an example. The purpose of investigating the Bordwell regime in Cinepol is also to grapple with what some would consider the soft power—the taken-for-granted value and position—(see Fraser 2003; Nye 1990, 2004) of Western film scholarship. In my discussion of their discourse on pleasure—“a different kind of fun”—in doing structural analysis, I propose that the Bordwell regime is as much theirs as it is an American scholarship. At the end of the chapter, moreover, I include an analysis of student films that largely reflects their interest in the structural.

**The Bordwell regime**

One of the first things that a new member who joins Cinepol figures out is perhaps that he or she will have to or want to learn how to read films like the senior students do. That the senior students know, for instance, what kind of lens a shot uses and to what effect just by looking at it is enough to overwhelm the new members who decide to stay in the club. It is, in fact, rather unlikely for many of the newcomers to know the exact definition of a shot. In all
likelihood, they try out the club simply because they like movies. In this way, the club members interpret movies by recognizing the significance of how a shot or a series of shots—the building blocks of film—uses film language to construct meaning. In Cinepol, this activity is called structural analysis as the members make sense of the movies they watch by examining the texts at the level of the formal structure or composition.

Most of the senior students, however, had been in the same shoes as the new members when they first joined the club. The difference that the newcomers experience is simply that the senior students have learned to recognize and analyze the structural composition of film by studying with *Film Art*, a popular introduction to film, as their textbook. Each year, the club members come up with their own syllabus to master film language. The basic format that the club members decided upon during my fieldwork was to choose a member who would teach the junior students by explaining and demonstrating important concepts from *Film Art* with film clips they prepare. We had two such seminars focusing on film style in addition to two extra seminars on filmmaking for the new members. This was, however, not how the club used to organize their study meetings on film theory. The club members had decided to cut down the number of meetings on theory while they still met weekly to discuss movies in order to take the toll off the busy university students. The new measure, however, did not last long as the club has recently—after my fieldwork—resumed their weekly meetings on *Film Art*, which proves the centrality or utility of the text in the club even further.

As can be seen in Table 2 below that I have reconstructed from the group meeting to provide the reader with a quick overview, these seminars covered the core chapters of *Film Art* that normally takes a full semester to learn. Despite the amount of material to cover in a single day, however, the presenters delivered their lectures effectively by choosing clips from familiar
(e.g., Bong Joon-ho) and classical (e.g., Alfred Hitchcock) films that illustrate each concept perfectly. I was, in fact, struck by how each person had prepared for the seminar with a teacher’s heart. It is, of course, rather unlikely for the new members to soak up the flood of information at once; however, many have become experts not only of the contents of *Film Art* but also at teaching the book especially as they take on the responsibility of training the next classes of students over the years.

Table 2: The basic framework of the October 2008 seminar on *Film Art* prepared by Shinu (my summary)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Plot structure</th>
<th>Character formation</th>
<th>Function of dialogues</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Original</td>
<td>- Opening conflict</td>
<td>- Schematic</td>
<td>Condition of good dialogues</td>
<td>Conflicts; crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Adaptation</td>
<td>crisis</td>
<td>- Depth of interiority</td>
<td>- Economic (within the flow of the narrative)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative vs. plot</td>
<td>climax</td>
<td>- Symbolic</td>
<td>- Fitting for the character</td>
<td>Motives; subplots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Cause and effect</td>
<td>ending</td>
<td>Other ways of defining characters</td>
<td>- Compelling</td>
<td>- Suspense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(flashback)</td>
<td>Anticlimax</td>
<td>- One dimensional</td>
<td>- Clear and to the point</td>
<td>- Surprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot and story</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Round characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Simple plot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Multiple plots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I. Narrative as a Formal System**
- Narrative
- Three elements of narrative: time, space, causality
- Non-narrative: e.g., documentary, avant-garde

**II. Style as a Formal System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mise-en-scène</th>
<th>Camera</th>
<th>Editing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements of mise-en-scène</td>
<td>Visual units</td>
<td>Camera angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Setting</td>
<td>- Frame</td>
<td>- high-angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Costume; makeup</td>
<td>- Shot</td>
<td>- low-angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lighting</td>
<td>- Scene</td>
<td>- eye-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film</td>
<td>- Sequence</td>
<td>- oblique-angle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Size: 70mm, 35mm, 16mm, 8mm</td>
<td>Long take &amp; point of view shot</td>
<td>Depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Development: negative; positive</td>
<td>Camera composition</td>
<td>Camera movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- extreme long shot &amp; bird’s eyes view</td>
<td>Camera movement</td>
<td>Camera movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Depth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2 (cont.)

| - Exposure: high; low sensitivity | - long shot | - pan | - 5’ rule |
| - Lens: wide-angle; telephoto    | - medium long shot | - dolly, tracking | Jump cut |
|                                 | - medium shot    | - crane shot     | Parallel editing |
|                                 | - medium close-up | - hand-held      |              |
|                                 | - close-up       | - steady cam     |              |
|                                 | - extreme close-up|                  |              |

### III. Useful Film Vocabularies (abridged)

B movie … establishing shot … junket … MacGuffin … documentary … propaganda … splatter & slasher

* Reference: *Film Art: An Introduction* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson

*Film Art*, however, is more than just a tool for learning film language in Cinepol. Their training in the book prescribes a way of thinking about film and ultimately a means with which the club members police their talk. In precisely the formalistic approach to film that the members learn from *Film Art*, each member is expected to know and discuss how a film constructs meaning more so than what it represents. It is, in fact, taboo in Cinepol to talk only about the “story” of a film. The worst thing a member can do is to treat film “as if in a social science class” where film is used as a window to look at a society or a culture. As the members have said, “to talk about human rights when talking about a movie about human rights is to fly off on a tangent.” I have, in fact, heard this phrase repeatedly throughout my membership in Cinepol. It is, however, not that they have no concern for the society. The students I talked to belied the hearsay that today’s youth have no interest in politics or society. Especially outside of the group setting, the socio-ethical interests of the members ranged widely from the politics of gender to history as representation in film. They rather had decided to detach their group conversation from politics in order to use their limited time together to focus on film. Structural analysis as they practice in Cinepol, in this sense, is quite different from the kind of ideological analysis that the previous generations of cinephiles worldwide engaged in to tackle the structural
roots of social problems (e.g., Comolli and Narboni 1969; chapter 2). For the members of Cinepol, the word “structural” always points to film.

I suggest that *Film Art*, in this sense, functions like a regime in which the club members regulate their talk. The students, in other words, can be said to participate in what film scholar Robert B. Ray calls the “Bordwell regime” (2001: 29-63). As Ray notes, Bordwell has headed one of the two “caporegimes”—a high ranking member in an organized crime syndicate—in the field of American film studies since the 1980s (40). While Bordwell is certainly not the only film researcher with a prolific body of works, as Ray points out, the most significant piece in the attributes of Bordwell’s exceptional credibility is the standing of his scholarship as rational science as follows.

Bordwell’s work, like that of almost everyone designated by our culture as providing “knowledge,” participates thoroughly in the apparatus that Nietzsche describes as Western civilization’s last great religion: rational science. As a writer, Bordwell is classically clear. He eschews “excessive” metaphors and obviously bravura figures …, thereby avoiding the fate of Michelet, whose devotion to the signifier prompted his demotion from history to literature. Bordwell’s preference for active verbs and clearly defined transitions reaffirms the rational tradition’s faith in cause-and-effect sequences of distinct, locatable events. Even the format of his books, maintained through several volumes, is scientific: double-columned, oversized, they literally stand out from the rest of a shelf of ordinary humanities books, manifesting the signs of textbook authority amidst the clutter of mere “interpretations.” (41)

To be fair, the principal text in Ray’s essay is *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (hereafter, *CHC*), a 1985 film studies classic written by David Bordwell, Jane Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. I take *Film Art* instead to be the heart of the Bordwell regime as it stands in Cinepol because it is arguably the single most important text other than film for them. The devotion to empiricism that drives *CHC*, moreover, is as rigorous as ever in *Film Art*. Bordwell, to wit, has not only produced knowledge but a regime of knowledge such that his scholarship has become a model of

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127 Ray names Dudley Andrew as the other of the two caporegimes in the field of American film studies.
scientific research—at least in the case of South Korean film scholars who I discuss below—thanks to his painstaking attention to logic and evidence as only empirical data can provide.

The very desire for the scientific, in fact, was what motivated the writers of *Film Language* (Yŏnghwa ḍonŏ) to adopt the formalist scholarship of Bordwell in the 1980s (Kim S. 2000: 248). Remembered as so-called the first generation of film students in South Korea, the writers of the quarterly resorted to Bordwell in order to legitimize their writings in which they investigated whether South Korean cinema can position itself as an alternative to Hollywood (249-251). Most notably, Yi Yonggwan, the editor of *Film Language*, studied how Korean New Wave films contradict the stylistic system of the classical Hollywood cinema in terms of mise-en-scène, narrative structure, cinematography, and editing (Mun 2005: 228). Film scholar Mun Chaech’ŏl notes that Yi’s critical writings on contemporary Korean cinema wielded significant influence throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s as South Korean film criticism suffered from the lack of theoretical foundation until that time (227). According to film scholar Kim Soyoung, however, the ways in which the writers dissected and denoted film sequences with numbers and triangles as if in a statistical chart produced a mere effect of objectivity, rendering their work pseudoscientific (249). Using Bordwell to find an alternative to Hollywood was, in a way, a self-defeating measure as Kim argues since it was Bordwell himself who denied the possibility of an alternative to Hollywood (251).129

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128 The writers of *Film Language*—most notably film critic Chŏng Sŏngil—also adopted the auteurist theory popularized by *Cahiers du Cinéma*—the more recognized of references in South Korea (see Moon 2005: 222)—and Andrew Sarris of *The Village Voice*.

129 David Bordwell and Janet Staiger argue in *CHC* that “[b]ecause of the world-wide imitation of Hollywood’s successful mode of production, […] oppositional practices have generally not been launched on an industry-wide basis” (383). They note furthermore that there is “[n]o absolute, pure alternative to Hollywood” due to the historical centrality of Hollywood’s mode of production that complicates the development of other alternatives (384).
Notwithstanding the failed attempt at using the Bordwellian formalism, however, South Koreans continued to see Bordwell’s scholarship in a positive light. In 2002, for instance, the Pusan International Film Festival\(^{130}\) invited Bordwell to give two lectures on contemporary film studies and South Korean cinema in Seoul and Pusan, respectively.\(^{131}\) Bookstores in Seoul that I visited often also displayed his books, *Film Art* in particular, in the prime locations of their film and performing arts sections.\(^{132}\) The following excerpt from an interview in *Cine21*, a popular film magazine, perhaps best illustrates Bordwell’s reputation in South Korea. Bordwell’s name was brought up when the interviewer, Jeong Yoon-chul, whom the reader might recognize better as the director of *Marathon* (2005), asked for the opinion of film critic Chŏng Sŏngil on the general lack of formalist analysis in South Korean film journalism.

JYC: One thing that I find most wanting in South Korean film criticism is that there is too much focus on the narrative. Korean film critics are obsessed with the plot and story. The biggest question for them is whether or not the story is well constructed. Of course, movies tell stories. It is the essence of film; but we should also be attentive to what makes film, film. Film has cuts, sounds; and it exists as an art. So it is rather unfortunate that film critics unpack movies, focusing only on the story, characters, and narrative construction. A few years back, I went to a lecture given by David Bordwell, the author of *Film Art*, when he visited Korea. I was amazed at how an American professor used “shot-by-shots” to analyze the works of Hong Sang-soo and Im Kwon-taek and compared them to those of Hou Hsiao-hsien. His thorough mise-en-scène analysis also left a great impression on me. Why is it so difficult to see film criticism in Korea that pays attention to the aesthetics or the text itself? (*Cine21*, 8 May 2007)

In this rather unusual interview in which a filmmaker interviews a journalist, Jeong, in a sense, is proposing a radical idea that Bordwell understands South Korean films better than South Korean critics right in the face of one of the most respected film critics in the country.\(^{133}\)

\(^{130}\) The romanization of the festival title since has changed to Busan International Film Festival.

\(^{131}\) “Contemporary Film Studies: The Problems and Pleasures of Problem-Solving.” Dongguk University, Seoul, 12 November 2002; “Global Liftoff: South Korean Cinema and Recent Film History.” Pusan Film Festival, 16 November 2002.

\(^{132}\) While *Film Art* is available in both English and Korean in South Korea, bookstores generally carry the Korean translation.

\(^{133}\) Chŏng Sŏngil is famous for having introduced critical theories such as those of Baudrillard, Deleuze, and Foucault into South Korean film criticism through his *Cahier*-inspired film magazine *Kino*. 
reflections on Bordwell, in fact, are quite remarkable considering that Bordwell himself has acknowledged elsewhere that he has only limited knowledge of South Korean cinema (Bordwell 2002: 240). In suggesting a more desirable way of writing about film as such, Jeong arguably participates in the Bordwell regime in a manner that is close to the ways in which the members of Cinepol police themselves. That Bordwell’s translocal readings can be more compelling than local film criticism likewise validates how the club members privilege the structural over the sociocultural in their film readings in which there is no right answer but only a right (preferred) method.

Before moving on to an actual group study meeting in the club, however, it might be helpful to know that Film Art has not been the only text that the club members studied in the past. In recent years, the members decided to abandon critical theories such as psychoanalysis and semiotics from their curriculum although this change has been a gradual process and an incomplete one. A few members, especially older students who remember the old days or have closer ties to the club’s graduates, still studied critical theories ranging widely from those of Adorno to Žižek. It also looks like Film Art has not been the only textbook the club used for the purposes of learning film language in the past. One of the reasons why the club has nonetheless decided to prune their syllabus, on the one hand, is that today’s university students are, as I have mentioned repeatedly, too busy to be studying difficult critical theories. Although many of the members major in the humanities or social sciences, students from a wide range of backgrounds such as engineering and law join the club.

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134 Bordwell, on the other hand, is a scholar of Chinese film. This is a translation of his lecture given at the 2002 Pusan International Film Festival. From the manuscript, this lecture seems to be the one that Jeong had attended.

135 In March 2000, for instance, the presenter had used the following books in addition to Film Art: Louis D. Giannetti, Understanding movies (1987); Susan Hayward, Key concepts in cinema studies (1996); James Monaco, How to read a film: the art, technology, language, history, and theory of film and media (1981); and Stefan Sharff, The elements of cinema: toward a theory of cinesthetic impact (1982).
Another reason, which is perhaps more significant than the first, is that many of the members have become critical of using theories. Students, including those who major in the humanities, openly expressed their objection. In the club itself, according to Jun who majors in Korean literature, it was preposterous to think that they, including himself, could fully understand and use critical theories on their own. Alex who majors in philosophy likewise questioned the use of critical theories even in South Korean film journalism in which it is not at all rare for one to come across names such as those of Deleuze or Derrida. Alex added that he came to doubt the integrity of the citations in film journalism after reading for himself the primary texts whose depth of thought awed and staggered him. Easily-used citations, in his view, were somehow no more than a stumbling block to those who do serious scholarship.

The club members’ choice of Bordwell, likewise, did not come without due criticism. Interestingly enough, those who openly expressed their dissatisfaction included the most vocal proponents—such as Alex who excused himself saying that humans are paradoxical beings—of structural analysis. For them, structural analysis is not and should not be the only way of interpretation. For the purposes of the group discussion, however, they had found no other better alternative as, I believe, it helps their conversation stay close to the text. The members, moreover, came to the realization that structural analysis cannot explain all there is to the cinematic experience. Director Lee, for one, came to see a drawback in structural analysis after doing a shot-by-shot analysis of Rear Window (an excerpt of his analysis is included in this chapter). Prior to undertaking the exercise, he had presumed that the viewing subject is subordinate to the text. The lesson he got was that cinema’s effects on audience are not necessarily dependent on the structural elements. All things considered, however, what is important is that the members have decided to keep Film Art against all odds. In my opinion,
Film Art makes sense to this generation of students who demand practicality because the book offers a down-to-earth (cf. “the arid heights of theory”) approach to film in contrast to what an increasing number of students consider the pretentious study of critical theories. The significance of the Bordwell regime as it operates in Cinepol in this sense is even weightier as it has outlived rivaling texts.

A “good film”: Children of Men (Alfonso Cuarón, 2006)

In a way, I met Bordwell on my first day in the club—the day when Alex told me that I should have joined them three years earlier—even before I got to know the members by name. Alex, recently discharged from his military duty, returned to campus and led the first group study meeting of the fall semester (second semester of their academic year). As is their custom, he came prepared to distribute his paper (*at’ikūl*) for presentation and group discussion. It was on this handout as well as in his presentation that I spotted Bordwell. To note, the club members do not cite Bordwell in their papers for the group study meetings unless they meet to study film language and theory for which they give citations as Shinu has done above. I did not, however, have to be told as it seemed obvious. I scribbled down “Bordwell” in the margins of the handout though I did not know a single thing about the club at the moment. Bordwell, in this way, was not a scholar to be cited in writing but praxis in the club.

The film that Alex chose for the group to discuss on this day was Children of Men, a predominantly English-language co-production (UK, US). Children of Men, to provide a short

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136 See Moon (2005) on the compulsory conscription system in South Korea.

137 Alfonso Cuarón is a Mexican film director, screenwriter and film producer.
synopsis, is a science fiction set in London of 2027—a chillingly near future—that has become an utter dystopia. Amidst the terror of wars, the real horror that drives the narrative is the fact that the entire human race is now barren and unable to conceive. In the opening scene, customers in a coffee shop stand stunned in front of the television as they learn about the death of the world’s youngest person in a way that is rather reminiscent of how people watched the spectacularized images of the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The drama of the film develops as Theo, an ex-activist, carries out the task of transporting a miraculously pregnant woman to a refuge, a ship called Tomorrow.

*Children of Men*, as Alex noted, was never released in South Korea. This fact itself is telling since South Korea, based on my observation of the IMDB data, is extraordinary in its broad range of film imports in comparison to other countries. That Alex chose *Children of Men* for the group study meeting, in other words, reveals how the members watch beyond what is already an enormously diverse choice of films available in South Korea. One of the great things about belonging to a group of cinephiles, moreover, is that the members share with friends the rare gems they come across. This was precisely what Alex did. He said he decided on *Children of Men*, knowing well that it (a 2006 film) might be new to some, because he was convinced that no one should miss the film. Alex did not give a specific reason as to why, but I doubt it is just because it tells an imaginative or perhaps an important story. There is, in fact, the original novel by P.D. James if it is the story anyone is after.

I gather instead that Alex meant to say that no one should miss the film because it is—to introduce an often heard concept that I encountered during fieldwork—a “good film” (*choŭn yŏnghwa*). The sense of a good film certainly varies from person to person. A person may appreciate creative filmic imagination, for instance, while another person might care for
particular worldviews that films share with the audience. The qualifier “good” is, in this sense, a subjective term whose meaning is not fixed except for one catch that the film has to be well made in the sense that it is thoughtfully designed. This is the kind of logic by which certain films are considered misogynistic but good at the same time. By the same token, a perfectly ethical film, if such a thing can exist, is unlikely to be considered good singularly on the grounds of its political correctness. As the following excerpt from Alex’s paper shows, a good film according to Alex displays effective narrative construction and masterful design at the structural level of the text. The judgment of goodness, therefore, involves a particular way of looking in the Bordwell regime, a sign of which is stamped all over Alex’s reading of the film. The bonus with *Children of Men* is that it carries a sobering political message (it is ideal to be both).

The shot in the opening scene is one of the most memorable takes in the film. The opening scene starts with a long take of people in a café, all about to cry. It gives off a doomsday kind of gloom. Here, Theo approaches from the back while the camera follows him as he walks out of the café. As Theo leaves off to the left, the camera pans the dreary streets of London in 2027. The camera then continues to follow Theo again at a distance and turns 180 degrees towards the café with Theo as an axis. The café explodes. The camera moves in slowly; and there is the title screen.

The opening scene sums up the circumstances of the time all in a single take along with the television voice in the café. A memorable incident (the bomb terror) also gives us an unmediated and very direct feel for London of 2027. In short, a single shot replaced a series of shots that could have accompanied cheap narration that goes like, “Humankind in 2027, *blah, blah, blah*.” […]

This is the scene in which Theo’s party meets the Fishes when they attempt to board the ship. It is also the longest take in the film which carries on for more than five minutes. It is meaningless to explain the details here because it is a shot in which an enormous number of people move in countless directions. With the duration of long, five-some minutes, the anxiety, horror, and cruelty of war multiply. Apart from its effectiveness, it is an aesthetically perfect cut.

The main focus of Alex’s paper that he used for presentation and group discussion was on the film’s mise-en-scène as can be seen in the excerpt. He noted that mise-en-scène analysis would be more interesting and productive than a shot-by-shot analysis, which is something of a

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138 I do not mean the loanword “well-made” (wel meidũ) films, which in Korean means “high quality” films that reflect both commercial viability and artistic mastery (see Choi 2010: 144-163).

139 Mise-en-scène means all visual presentation before the camera.
tradition in the club, for this film because of its frequent use of long takes and the linear plot line. There are, in other words, fewer shots to analyze while the relationships between shots and scenes are relatively simple.

Alex gave us five single-spaced pages of analysis with careful attention paid to the film’s mise-en-scène. If he praised Cuarón’s “critical consciousness,” he did so only as he judged the film as an artistic text. For Alex, *Children of Men* is a good film because it is efficiently constructed with nothing to waste, the economy of which actually intensifies the visual pleasure and emotional experience of this imaginative science fiction. Alex, in fact, celebrates in the conclusion of his paper that he has found yet another master auteur (*kŏjang*). The focus of my investigation is, however, not on the notion of good film itself but on the good and acceptable way of *looking at film*. I could have very well used a “bad” film as an example to demonstrate the ways in which the club members judge a film. The club members, in this manner, must not merely address the story, however wonderful it might be, if they mean their analysis to be proper for the purposes of the group. Talking about social issues is equally unacceptable without a close reading of the structure of the text. A poor analysis of *Children of Men* might address, for example, a range of topics from the plummeting birthrate in South Korea to the harmful effects of environmental pollutants on human reproduction. Such an analysis would be unacceptable not because it is inaccurate but because it shifts the nucleus of the conversation from film to something other than film. (My question about race in the film likewise was politely brushed off as a part of the story.) Cinepol as a speech community is thus strictly policed.

I take the word “police,” as I have used a part of it in my pseudonym for the club, to suggest the presence of a law or standard that regulates their talk although this is not necessarily

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140 The notion of auteur is another important concept that is as significant as genre in viewing practices and tastes.
a word that I gleaned from fieldwork. If I should choose a word from their own speech to describe their practice, it would be “minor” (mainŏ), a term that I occasionally heard the members use. To explain it in simple terms, minor refers to their marginality as viewers who take movies seriously unlike the casual audiences. I did not, however, always understand its exact meaning because students seemed to use the word rather flexibly; so I seized the moment and asked Jun during an interview what he meant when he said he has a “minor taste” (mainŏ ch’wihyang).

Jun: Let’s see. When it comes to movies, it is common for people to think of watching a movie while eating popcorn in a multiplex. Or they can watch a video at home or at a “video room,” lying on a sofa. What I mean is something different. It is about watching a movie with a truly, truly sincere (chinjhada) attitude. It’s really watching a movie with a cinematic mind (ssinema-jŏgin maindŭ). That is, you don’t watch a movie like it’s a television show. You watch as if you’re reading a literary masterpiece. […] Josie: Then it’s not necessarily a question of film itself but of an attitude, right?

Jun: Yes, I do think attitude is more important. Moreover, there are films that are suitable for such an attitude.

In his answer, having a sincere attitude for him is inseparable from having an attentive and meticulously cinematic mind with which he reads a movie as if it is a literary piece. Film Art, in this particular manner, can be said to serve as a pathway to sincere spectatorship. To put it differently, the formalistic ways in which the club members watch movies do not necessarily or always mean compulsory restriction for them as the word police, which I have chosen for the purposes of making an argument, suggests. If the term police is descriptive of the condition into which the members place their talk, minor, in this way, is denotative of their attitude that is cliquish—because of their unusual sincerity—in watching movies.

The loss of such sincerity was, in fact, what a few members objected to when the club experimented with giving the new (and old) members the option of not preparing a paper for the group discussion. They also had allowed the new students to choose a topic they wanted to discuss rather than doing a close reading of the text. These were all part of the efforts to attract
new students in the spring semester when a new school year began. Juhee, a senior member, however, confided her disappointment about the changes as follows.

As for me, I did appreciate that we dialogued at the last meeting. We can actually have a really good conversation if every one is on the same page. That is, if we share a lot of knowledge. But the thing is, we don’t. To play it down a little, our current meetings are like online discussion threads (int’ŏnet taetkŭl). To be more positive, our meetings are now freer but lacking in content. The [newly joined] presenters, likewise, depend on things like the director’s profiles or actors’ interviews. If anyone came to learn, I think, he or she would be rather disappointed.

Juhee was certainly not the only member who was disappointed. Although none of the members believed that the structural analysis should dictate their group, their conversation without it was rather below par. It was, as Juhee said, difficult to tell apart the group’s own conversation from that of the anonymous individuals who leave casually their thoughts online. In a way, the members sacrificed the sense of being “minor” (sincere) with their decision to exercise more tolerance. The word minor as such is not a reference to how they distinguish themselves for the sake of being different in and of itself. In using the word minor, the members make sense of or express their awareness of their Bordwellian habits as idiosyncrasy that comes from their desire of knowing film intimately. This is arguably why Jun used the adjective “minor” instead of “different” to modify the word taste (ch’wihyang).

In the words of another student, sincerity was tantamount to humility. By the time I started interviewing the members, I knew that Hongjun, one of the senior students, is known for his love of film critics whose writings he had followed for the past ten years since he was a teenager. To this day, I cannot think of him without associating his name to those of film critics Yi Tongjin, Kim Hyeri, and Kim Yŏngjin. I was curious why he liked certain film critics over others and he answered my question as follows.

Well, this is a strictly subjective feeling on my part. Now that I think about it, I think they are people who truly love film. I think there are a number of characters, or could I say virtues, that critics should be equipped with. First of all, they must have eyes to see—penetrating eyes. Then, they should have beautiful language with which to express what they see in words. Last but not least, they must love
film. A critic should not tear films apart as if from above; never dismantles but is always humble. By humility, I mean this. I believe a person becomes humble when he or she loves.

There is a striking resemblance to how Jun speaks of his minor taste in the way in which Hongjun names the cardinal virtues of a film critic. That is, while Jun pairs what he calls cinematic mind with a sincere attitude before a work of art, Hongjun couples the penetrating set of eyes with humility, which for him, is love of film. The critics he admires, of course, do not necessarily dissect films into annotated shots and segments in their writings that are intended for the general audience who like movies enough to be reading their film reviews. The critics do, on the other hand, stay close to the text and never “tear films apart as if from above.” That these words of Hongjun recall Bordwell’s denouncement of “the arid heights of Theory” (1983: 6) is perhaps not an accident.¹⁴¹ To rephrase their words, I would say that a close reading of film is inseparable from loving it—cinephilia—for these students.

After putting the words of the club members together, it appears that they do not merely police the content of their talk but construct their identity as cinephiles by adhering to or practicing structural analysis. That the weekly meetings to study Film Art returned not too long after their experiment in cutting the number of meetings shows likewise that the close reading of the text has to be the core of the club’s attraction whether or not it is agreeable to the potential members at first. The Bordwell regime as such has come a long way from how the earlier generation of cinephiles in South Korea applied the method in their attempt to find an alternative to Hollywood in the national cinema. If there is a reason why Bordwell is used among South Korean cinephiles today, it would be the pleasure they find in the close reading of the text as I discuss in the following section.

¹⁴¹ Quoted in Ray (2001: 35).
The politics of pleasure: “a different kind of fun”

The Bordwell regime, however useful it may be to the club, might, for some, suggest a case of colonial mimicry. The ways in which the club members use *Film Art* is, in particular, “*almost the same, but not quite*” as the original (Bhabha 1984: 126, original italics). Colonial mimicry, according to Homi Bhabha, is the process of fixing the colonial as a system of “cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse” (131). The ways in which the Bordwell regime operates in the club, in fact, bears considerable resemblance to Bhabha’s description of colonial mimicry as a hegemonic form of knowledge production. It is true that the club members use *Film Art* critically, weighing the pros and cons of the Bordwell regime. The crude fact, however, does not change that they use an American scholarship.

This predicament may best be recast in terms of soft power, first coined by Joseph S. Nye (1990; 2004). While I would not say, perhaps naively, that there is a group of masterminds who “get you to want to do what [they] want” (Nye 2004: 6) in order to control knowledge production and circulation in academia worldwide, the attraction—even of the love-hate variety—of Western, if not American, scholarship in virtually every discipline is near universal. If, as Nye says, soft power exercises its power through not only influence and persuasion but also—most significantly—attraction, what he calls its “currency” (63), then Bordwell seems to fit the bill. Film students in South Korea are neither threatened (by influence) nor convinced (by persuasion) to use *Film Art*. Other than the tradition of using Bordwell in South Korea, one way to explain the popularity of *Film Art* would be to consider the attraction that it carries—an

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142 Geraldo Zahran and Leonardo Ramos argue that Nye’s definition of soft power “is not the only one and its various definitions are not free of contradictions among them” and point to the lack of reference to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony and the precise meaning of tangibility that differentiates soft power from hard power (2010: 16-7).
isomorphic cousin of an American kind, so to speak, of the Benj-minian aura. It would be safe
to say, in other words, that a Korean “reproduction” (Benjamin 1936) of *Film Art* that perfectly
serves the purpose of a film textbook would, in theory, lose much attraction or authority for the
readers in South Korea.

The detail that I want to put into question, in this sense, is the very Americanness of the
Bordwell regime. I investigate, in a nutshell, where the practical, not legal or even cultural,
ownership of theory lies. The reader may recall that the members of Cinepol do not cite
Bordwell in their film analyses. This might be a simple and obvious point, but it nonetheless
speaks to the fact that Bordwell’s scholarship is woven intimately into the fabric of the club’s
own discourse. The club members, moreover, enjoy doing structural analysis, which Jun once
called “a different kind of fun.” In light of their discourse of pleasure in structural analysis as
such, I suggest that the Bordwell regime is as much theirs as it is an American scholarship.

There was, however, a reason why Jun had to describe doing structural analysis as a
“different kind” of fun. This happened at a freshman orientation in the spring when the new
school year began. The orientation itself was successful as far as the number of visitors that
showed up is concerned. The classroom that we had reserved was, in fact, completely packed
with new faces. We were happy to see the turnout as we had been worried about the dwindling
number of members, a predicament across all university clubs of late. The rigorous advertising
on campus perhaps paid for itself. With an unexpectedly large crowd gathered, however, Alex,
in a way, disregarded the club’s late decision to open up the discussion in the spring semester
and repeated, stressing many times over standing at the podium, that Cinepol is a club that does
structural analysis. Structural analysis was, in fact, made quite synonymous with the club’s
identity in his speech. It was then when Jun added his words from the seats that structural
analysis is a different kind of fun. I suppose that Jun appended a positive description as he did not wish to scare the newcomers away; but I also imagine that he wanted to support what he later told me was his friend’s nostalgic attachment to structural analysis.

As I have explained above, the club members meant to make the club easier and more accessible to the new and younger generation of members. In a way, structural analysis was destined to be a part of this effort because it is dry (ttakttakhada) and difficult (ŏryŏpda) if not time-consuming as the club members themselves acknowledge particularly on behalf of those who have not yet learned to read film closely. It is also not unheard of for some to say openly that they do not necessarily like to analyze movies. Alex, for instance, recalled a member who used to resent the sense of recognizing the structural elements in movies when they first began to learn film language. They had talked about how they just like watching movies, period.

The general consensus, however, is that “you see as much as you know.” The members expressed, in particular, the sense of satisfaction and pleasure that comes from growing in knowledge. Director Lee commented in this vein about his experiences in leading group studies in the club. He said, “Really, I find myself very, very different each time I lead a study meeting. Not that I am ‘perfect(ed)’ in any sense, but I really do learn a lot whenever I take charge of a meeting.” The members, in fact, acquire their finely honed ability to read film from training themselves to be comfortable enough to teach others and lead a group in discussion. One of the study meetings that Lee was in charge of during my fieldwork, for instance, was on Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), a film he selected for the group study. An amazing effort that he put into the meeting, in addition to a long paper, was doing “shot-by-shot” and “scene-by-scene” analyses. In other words, he numbered and appended every shot and scene as in Table 3 below.
In the spreadsheets (“shot-by-shot” and “scene-by-scene”) that Lee shared with the group, he had divided the film into 30 scenes and 759 shots with which he provided short notes on the mise-en-scène as well as the relationship between shots and scenes. This means that he actually spent the time to stop at the end of every shot and recorded his observations for the entire length of the film. It is, then, no wonder that the senior members were so quick to judge whatever they saw in movies since they all received such training with the members of the previous generations who ran the club more rigorously. Although the senior members might not have done the likes of shot-by-shot analysis for the entire length of every film they watched, they did have homework and quizzes during their meetings in the past. In the narratives of a few members, in fact, they were no less than students of film, recalling how they felt pleased with themselves with their progress.

That “you see as much as you know,” however, is not limited to the pleasure of growing in knowledge. One’s viewing experience is also richer so much as one knows what to see and what to look for. This ability to see more, not only more than others but also more than before, goes to the heart of a “different kind of fun.” Junsu, now an alumnus, was one of those who

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Table 3: Excerpt of Lee’s “shot-by-shot” spreadsheet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Shot</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Lens</th>
<th>Angle</th>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Object, Action &amp; Continuity</th>
<th>Information &amp; Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>Blinds up;</td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Close-up</td>
<td>Wide-angle</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Tilt/pan</td>
<td>Cat; fence; building; sweating man</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paramount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long shot</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>Level</td>
<td>Dolly/side</td>
<td>Thermometer; response to the radio sound</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>361</td>
<td>Knee shot</td>
<td>Wide-angle</td>
<td></td>
<td>Scratches</td>
<td>Shot no.26 [earlier shot with same action]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With this level of attention to detail, Lee’s pensiveness was on full display, even to the point of dictating notes on every part of the film. For such plots, it was clear that Lee was fully committed to the success of the film, though he lacked the experience of world-class directors.

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decided to stay in Cinepol because the club showed him that there was a lot more to see in a movie than just the story. He commented on his experience in the club as follows.

The first group study meeting that I attended was on *Courage under Fire*, led by a senior member of the class of ’97. We watched the movie from the beginning to the end, breaking off at the end of every shot. Our shot-by-shot analysis on the film went for four hours. Quite a number of people, fed up, really, did not stay after the meeting; but it was so much fun for me. There was so much that I didn’t know. I was able to see much more than before as we broke off at every shot like that.

It is, by necessity, impractical to break off every shot when one watches a movie in a theater as the club members did with *Courage under Fire* (Edward Zwick, 1996). With practice, however, it becomes easier to notice the formal properties of film even as one follows the story. For some, in fact, watching without thinking does not work so well anymore because they are now in the habit of seeing the structural in film. Junsu commented likewise that thinking about camera angles or the length of a shot does not get in the way when he watches movies. For him, it is actually more fun to be thinking about how each shot is constructed. Whenever he leaves a theater with his friends, having watched the same movie, he feels that he has seen more than others, as if he saw about 90% of what the movie has to offer while others see about 50%. It is certainly a good feeling to know that one sees more than others when everyone is looking practically at the same thing. The notion of having a different kind of fun, in this manner, does not refer necessarily to the labor that it requires but points to a specific type of pleasure, a “minor” difference, which cannot be experienced without the labor.

The moment when I grasped the significance of the group as a speech community as such is when I heard a student say in passing, “Where else will we ever be able to talk like this?” I came to a realization of the significance of the club, however, not just because his words expressed the joy of meeting with other cinephiles. To me, his words suggested rather that their gathering is meaningful because they share a particular, film-centric way of speaking about film

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143 Class (*hakbŏn*) refers to the year of entrance, not graduation, in Korean.
(“to talk like this”) as I have been discussing so far. I happened to stumble upon these words during one of the meetings that a few students, including a couple of members from film clubs at nearby universities, had formed to study film and critical theories outside the regular meetings. The film that Director Lee, one of the small group members, chose for one of the meetings was Solyaris (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972), which I remember to be the most baffling film we discussed. (After finishing three books together, he had decided to read each other’s papers and discuss movies together.) After about an hour and forty minutes of non-stop discussion about themes ranging from art to religion, this is how our conversation ended.

Lee: Sorry about picking such a bizarre movie (laughs lightly).
Travis: Hey, it was fun. […]
Lee: I was at a loss when I watched the movie at home, worrying how I’ll go about leading our discussion today.
Travis: Where else will we ever be able to talk like this?
Josie: True, I wouldn’t have done this alone.
Travis: Seriously, if we talked to regular people like we did, they’ll think we are all nut cases. We embrace movies like this because we’re all nuts.

That we had fun obviously does not mean that we found the movie entertaining in the usual sense of the word. A couple of us even said out of harmless spite against the bewildering film that we won’t be watching it again. It was, however, worth their time rather because they were able to discuss movies to their hearts’ content. If to recall Jun’s words that he has a taste that is minor, watching a movie with a sincere attitude is precisely what we did when we discussed Solyaris. Although we had already watched the film by ourselves before coming to the meeting, we did not stay away from Travis’ laptop, sitting around a table in a small room during the after hours at a hagwŏn (after-school academy) where Travis worked part-time near his university. We watched and re-watched parts, scrutinizing every minute detail mostly in the film’s mise-en-scène.144 It was as if we were to hunt down every piece of symbolism, allusion, and intertextual

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144 For the implications of digital film watching, see chapter 2.
references in the film. We laughed at ourselves for trying too hard, preoccupied with attributing meaning to every little thing in the film. *Solyaris*, to borrow Jun’s words, was the kind of film that called for such an attitude.

The Bordwell regime, in this manner, belongs *in practice* to the club members who use and find pleasure in it although *Film Art* is an American scholarship in the legal and cultural (as in the culture of academia) sense of the word. Theirs, I would say, is not a case of “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha 1984) but is one of “not quite the same but no less at home.” The use of Bordwell’s scholarship in the club, in other words, is not a case of servile mimicry of the West but of a masterful use of a regime of knowledge in transnational circulation. An ownership in practice as such is, in fact, not rare at all from Marxist theories to the *Harry Potter* series that travel across national and linguistic borders. *Film Art* is likewise not just an American scholarship when it is practiced in a group like Cinepol.

**Student films: études for filmic dexterity**

Before I move onto the cinéphilic discourse on watching movies (i.e., not of reading and analyzing movies) in the next chapter, I will briefly discuss movies that university students make. For the sake of protecting the anonymity of the club, I have chosen two selections from an intercollegiate film festival. My argument, however, is not necessarily affected by this choice as it applies generally to other student films as well. The quality of student films I have seen so far varies, depending greatly on funding and the purpose of production (e.g., a graduation project of a film studies major). The subject matter, style, and genre of their movies are likewise manifold as such that there would be a number of ways of talking about them.
The particular aspect that I take on below is the composition and design in these films that, in a way, show how the students appear to make films for the purposes of exercising filmmaking more so than for the sake of practicing storytelling. Student films are, in this vein, comparable to musical études composed for finger dexterity and the mastery of technique. The kind of études I have in mind is, however, not concert pieces like those written by Liszt or Rachmaninoff. In my reading of the films, I highlight how they are composed like arpeggios and scales that train the fingers through creative repetitions. If by accident, these films then mirror how the members of Cinepol are concerned more with the analysis of the structure than with the subject of a given text. Of the films produced largely independent of an institutional support (i.e., film club projects), I discuss two selections that featured in “Perhaps the best of movies” (Ōtchōmyōn ch’oegeo ū yōnghwa) hosted by Ewha Cinematheque in 2009.

The first of the two is titled, if to give a literal translation, *To where do love, sky, and one flow* (Yi Hyeri, 2008; hereafter, *To where*) produced by Nue at Ewha Womans University. The first thing I thought of when I settled down to translate the title was, however, “Bridge over Troubled Water.” While Yi says that the film can be read in different ways, an obvious way is to see it as a story of a young man who rejoins his dead sweetheart in death. Perhaps for the images of the flowing skies, the wearied and troubled state of the young man, and the departed who reappears to lend a hand over to the other side of life, I was reminded of the song by Simon & Garfunkel. The other one is titled *The Flame Girl* (Chŏn Hyŏngsŏk, 2008; hereafter, *Flame*) produced by Anxious Play Troup, a project group in a theater club, and Sogang Film Community,

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146 Ewha Cinematheque is a student organization (not a club) at Ewha Womans University; May 12-15, 2009.

147 *Sarangŭn, hanūrŭn, kādaenŭn ŏdiro hüllŏ kanŭn’ga* (28’30’’)

148 *Yŏm iyagi* (16’00’’); The English title is the one that Chŏn provided me along with the subtitles.
another student group, at Sogang University. Based on an original story written by a university student, the film tells the tale of a girl who is born with a body that burns hot like fire, the cause that makes her take a bag and leave all behind—all who exploit or reject her—to find a place to where she truly belongs.

As such, the films do have substantive stories to tell. The peculiarity about them, however, is that they do not reflect much interest in designing a plot that serves the purposes of narrating a story in a logical or viewer-friendly manner. The relatively loose narrative continuity, in fact, is partly a result of having a repetitious structure that I have compared to a set of scales and arpeggios in each film. In To where, for instance, it is unclear why the characters act the way they do. The part of the narrative of the couple falling in love—a part that a commercial romantic drama would spend much of its time on—is omitted from the plot. All the young man has done instead is taking a Polaroid picture of the girl, a complete stranger, the moment that he lays eyes on her. (With the stark setting of a remote bus station of some sort, the scene gives off an uncanny feeling rather like that of the beginning of a crime movie.) An explanation, the only one of its kind in the film, appears after the end of the credits, which, by the way, does not hint at having an extra scene added at the end. The viewer learns by the end that the young man has asked for the phone number of the girl although the scene itself was cut short from the festival screening. Without the ending that I saw in a DVD copy that I received from Yi, the film would have remained even more enigmatic for me. There is, moreover, a reason why Yi says that the film can be read in multiple ways. The progression of scenes is composed so that each scene shifts between the idyllic past (before the girl’s death) and the disquieting present (anticipating the young man’s suicide). The couple’s reunion after the death of the young man, for instance, can therefore be seen as either a representation of the present or an event in the past. To borrow
musical terms once more, the film travels back and forth between a set of scales in major and another in minor.

*Flame*, on the other hand, is quite linear in its plot progression. Not only the plot but also the shots in each scene, in fact, bear a resemblance to a set of arpeggios (i.e., notes played in succession) as the film uses a montage of black-and-white (mostly still) photographs in lieu of a moving picture. The sound, therefore, is entirely added post-production including the voiceover narration that reads the story of Flame, the protagonist, to the viewer. Because of the voice over narration, on the one hand, it is in theory not too difficult to follow the story. The montage, on the other hand, can be rather arbitrary and abstract in that I found the story not as easy to follow when I tried watching the movie with the sound off. The film is, to be sure, visually powerful with striking photographs and creative manipulations of some of the still shots. It is nevertheless an exercise in building film sound as the film becomes something else—a beautiful slideshow with an abstract narrative—without the carefully chosen narration, music, and sound effects.
What I find the student directors do instead of working on a logical presentation of the narrative is to wrestle with the question of cinema, what makes a film a film, to quote the interview of the film critic I cited above. *To where*, for example, uses sound or lack thereof as an audiovisual motif that characterizes the young man who is always incoherent and muffled except in his body language. The most conspicuous example of his inability to speak is shown in a scene in which he digs up the ground and tries time and again to shout his heart out as if to bury his pain there in the ground. Unlike the man in *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 1997) who buries his secret on a pitted temple wall, however, the young man never succeeds in drawing out the pain that is buried in him. *To where*, as such, practices using well-calculated images and sound to tell a story without resorting to words. *Flame*, likewise, grapples with the question of cinema although it is considerably more literary because of its narration and the original story. Precisely on account of its unconventional use of still photographs,¹⁴⁹ however, it reminds the viewer that film is (conventionally) made of time that is composed of twenty-four frames a second. It is, in fact, speed or lack thereof that the viewer experiences in the effects such as the still shot of an alarm clock that is supposed to be moving in the mise-en-scène and the accelerated editing that creates visual movement in the time of transition in the narrative. These student films as such are rich audio-visual texts rather than great narratives.

¹⁴⁹ He borrows the style from a documentary that he has seen.
Although I do not analyze filmic citations and influences in the movies here, these works can also be seen as a series of citations whether or not the citations have been intended. Yi said if she has citations she has used them unconsciously while it was on purpose that Chŏn used and borrowed from other films. I could see, in fact, the traces of filmmakers as diverse as and not limited to Jean-Luc Godard and Ozu Yasujiro in the mise-en-scène and the editing of their films. In the next chapter, I discuss the cinephilic discourse on watching precisely such diverse films as the ones cited in their own films. As far as the Bordwell regime is concerned, however, both the ways in which students interpret movies and the ways in which they make movies equally reflect their great interest in and fascination with the film medium itself: how it tells a story beyond the kind of story it tells.
Chapter Four

Affective Cinephilia: The “Taste” and “Feeling” of Film

In chapter 3, we have seen through the members of Cinepol the contemporary moment of the Bordwell regime which has influenced South Korean film culture since the 1980s. In this chapter, I turn my attention to the talk of the club members to examine the cultural significance of watching Western classics and art films, which has been another popular cinephiliic practice in South Korea particularly since the 1990s. I stress here on the consumption of classical and art films for the simple reason that cinephiles often differ from casual moviegoers in this connoisseurship. This is, however, not to say that the club members do not also watch commercial or mainstream films. The club members are, generally speaking, conversant with both types of films.

The specific problem I bring to the center of the discussion is once again the question of equity in power relationship that rises when cultural texts move across borders. While the cinephiliic love of movies is not so problematic in itself; the seemingly innocent act of the peoples of the Rest watching art films often produced in the West must be considered with the continuum of global inequity in mind. I start this chapter in this vein by introducing the postcolonial criticism of South Korean cinephilia by film scholar Kim Soyoung (2000) who argues that the local viewers watch art films as the vessels of Western modernity. I relate such a spectatorial disposition to the “postcolonial habitus” (see Dhareshwar 1989; Dickens 2011; Thapan 2004) in which it is easy for viewers to privilege certain films over others based on their national or continental brand. I illustrate the case in point with examples from my own encounters with film aficionados who watch French films in Seoul. My intervention in this
conversation, however, is not to reaffirm or to reject Kim’s argument wholesale. As I introduce below, I propose a response to Kim that considers a more nuanced dynamics in cultural exchange.

What I have learned from listening to the club members is that it would be too simplistic to jump quickly back to the conclusion that watching Western classics and art films points singularly to a colonized form of spectatorship, a judgment that is arguably outdated for today’s cinephiles. While recognizing the presence of the postcolonial habitus, I contend that the ways in which the club members watch movies index a shift in the more recent postcolonial period in which the power dynamics as well as the nature of cultural transactions between the putative West and the Rest (Hall 1992) have become more complex. José B. Capino’s defines decolonization not as a simple rejection of the West but “a dialectical play of relations between the ex-colony and its former ruler” sustained through both the critical distance from and the rapprochement with the West that globalization facilitates (2010: xxiii-iv). I adapt this idea to illustrate how cultural negotiations between the West and the Rest have changed the nature of the postcolonial world order.¹⁵⁰

I am, however, far from suggesting that the film club is an agent of decolonization or that it is actively anti-(neo)colonial. I examine instead the ways in which the club members’ shared language regarding cinema is unattached from the desire for the particular Eurocentric modernity that is supposedly embodied in Western art films; I consider this the sign of the change itself. While I study specific words and phrases of the club members, they in general reflect what a student called “pure” appreciation of film. By pure appreciation, I mean that the club members watch and enjoy movies primarily for the sake of the personal experience of relating to and understanding film itself quite apart from the secondary benefits of watching movies (e.g.,

¹⁵⁰ In other words, I do not discuss decolonization from the Japanese colonial or American neocolonial regimes. For more on decolonization, see Memmi (2006) and Spivak (1992).
listening to spoken English). It is, in specific, expressed most saliently in the cinephile discourse that uses the language of affect that renders film an intimate experience in the body and mind of the cinephile. The first of such rhetorical device I introduce are the general terms of “taste” (mat) and “feeling” (nŏkkim), two closely related words that the club members often use to describe their experience of film (which is not as easy to talk about when they read film closely). I then turn to the specific tropes of art film as an “unsalted dish” and a “pop in the ears” that speak to their pure appreciation of film that is free of postcolonial baggage. Lastly, I draw from an additional trope of eating an “(un)balanced diet” in film that renders art film only one of many in a healthy cinephilic repertoire. As the talk of the club members attests, the primary object of their love is film itself rather than the Western modernity embodied in film as cultural capital even as their tastes are quite cosmopolitan, a modifier that does not have to be synonymous to neocolonial.

A postcolonial critique

In The specters of modernity (Kŭndaesŏng ŭi yuryŏngdŭl), Kim Soyoung (2000: 220-239) argues that cinephiles as a social phenomenon emerged in South Korea in the 1990s. The 1990s was the time when film schools and other cultural institutions began producing a mounting number of film researchers (231-2). This was, moreover, the time when so-called art films arrived in Seoul outside of the circuit of European cultural centers (226). Kim, in fact, differentiates the cinephiles of the 1990s from their counterparts who gathered at the German and French Cultural Centers in the 1980s. The earlier generation, according to Kim, amounted to only about a few tens of people and therefore does not qualify as a significant population to have
an impact on either public film discourse or niche market (232). To put things in perspective, the population of cinephiles of the 1990s did not necessarily represent a new type but was significantly larger thanks to the changes in academic and cultural institutions (see chapter 2).

The spectrum of films that the new cinephiles watched in art-house theaters in the 1990s ranged widely from leftist to anarchist and from cult to feminist. In fact, these films are still screened year-round at art-house theaters in Seoul. Kim speculates that such films have been given the title of art film because their narrative and production styles depart from the model of Hollywood and also because they have been screened in the art houses of the West (226). Today, broadly speaking, art houses in South Korea show non-mainstream films as well as films produced outside of South Korea and Hollywood regardless of the year of production although the theaters themselves are not uniform in their programs. These arbitrary categories aside, however, it is important to note that the border that divides mainstream films from art films is not set in stone.

While recognizing that watching a wide array of art films is not harmful in itself, Kim names two problems that arose with the emergence of cinephiles in South Korea. She argues, first, that art films arrived “too late” as an artistic fetish (228). Having survived the test of time—thus worthy of being called “art”—these films lost the political edge that they once had (229). In the 1990s, in other words, the films of the 1960s and 1970s became depoliticized and taken out of their historical contexts due to the passage of time. Kim continues in a related vein that the audience of the 1990s made sense of art films through the writings that reproduced or copied those of the Western critics. For her, such reception effects the perpetuation of

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151 Examples of such films include Red Psalm (Miklós Jancsó 1972) and Boy Meets Girl (Leos Carax 1984).

152 Seoul Art Cinema, for instance, held the retrospectives of Claude Chabrol (1930-2010) and Agnès Varda (1928-) among many others in 2010.
colonialism (229). Kim denounces that such a fetishizing and colonized mode of spectatorship produces “necrophilia” (nekˈəropˈiːliə), namely an obsession with fossilized classics (229-30). If I could rephrase her argument in light of the title of her book, art film seems to have been consumed in South Korea for the West-centric modernity that it embodies or represents.

I would suggest, in this regard, that there is a “postcolonial habitus” in which the national or continental brand of film becomes a critical criterion of value and good taste. Postcolonial critics have used the term postcolonial habitus to denote a sustained internalization of colonial regimes of control and power asymmetries in the former colonies (Dhareshwar 1989; Dickens 2011; Thapan 2004). To put it simply, coloniality—particularly in the form of emotional and psychological baggage for the purposes of this chapter—has become a commonsense in the post-colonial world. It does not mean, however, that postcolonial habitus is absolute and static as a realm of influence as the term habitus itself implies lasting but not ever-lasting dispositions (Bourdieu 1972; 1990). In the following, therefore, I illustrate the postcolonial habitus that informs South Korean film culture with a few examples from my own encounters with cinephiles who watch French films in Seoul however with an understanding that the habitus is real but not totalistic.

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153 I use the term postcolonial likewise to signify continuation rather than a complete rupture from colonial practices.

154 The habitus is a “a product of history” (Bourdieu 1990: 54) and a “mediating notion that helps us revoke the commonsense duality between the individual and the social by capturing ... the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting [but not static] dispositions” (Wacquant 2006: 318, original italics). The fact that habitus is not “eternal” as Wacquant (319) notes renders it a useful term to refer to the particular colonial legacy in cinephilic culture that I likewise discuss as subject to variation.
French films in Seoul

If we consider how intimately colonialism is connected to class beyond race, ethnicity, or nationality (see Stavenhagen 1965; Wolpe 1975)—it often comes down to who gets what in the end—it would be helpful to introduce the factor of class to Kim’s critique of the colonized mode of spectatorship. Kim herself sees likewise the development of distinction-making (kubyŏl chitki) and the formation of a class that approaches film as cultural capital among the audiences of the 1990s (227-8). In other words, the pursuit of modernity in Western classics and art films is intimately connected to the consumption of art film as a classed experience. Her observation, in fact, holds true to what I have witnessed during my fieldwork, which is about fifteen years after the time of her writing.

At an earlier stage of my research, I hypothesized that cinephiles in Seoul had a “taste” for French cinema quite in Bourdieu’s sense of the word (Bourdieu 1984). Among all art films, French cinema particularly seemed to provide a type of cultural capital that separates those who have the taste for so-called art films from the rest of the crowd who watch, for example, big-budget blockbusters. French films appeared, in other words, to be a marker of classed distinction for some (see Park, forthcoming). Although I later came to realize the nuanced difference in the notion of taste (mat in Korean) used by the club members as I discuss further in this chapter, the tendency to make distinction by consuming art films seemed to be real enough.

In the Introduction, I have discussed how Seoul, relatively speaking, is a haven for cinephiles because of the wide range of films the city offers from classics to contemporary films from all around the world. One of the few things that stood out to me immediately in the city’s

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155 Park discusses the consumption of the Pusan International Film Festival as a classed experience.
filmic repertoires was a type of nostalgia for the French New Wave. Out of curiosity, I spent an entire day, for instance, braving through highly abstract Godard documentaries and video projects including about five chapters of *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* (1988-1998) at an art house called Film Forum located in a university town (near the north gate of Ewha Womans University) early in my fieldwork.  

Although the retrospective titles did not come from the 1960s, the influence of the French New Wave seemed to be genuine as the films reminded me constantly of the legendary movement headed by the *Cahiers* critics.

Naturally, I did not expect a lot of people to turn up on a hot Tuesday to watch Godard films. Throughout the course of the day, however, I saw a handful of the same faces returning to their seats. The young woman who received tickets at the entrance told me that she, too, had watched previously the entire series of the *Histoire(s)*, which runs for about four and half hours. From my fieldnotes, I found that I wrote a note to myself during the screenings asking whether my fellow viewers—most of whom looked young—were “serious film students.” In retrospect, the word student seems to have come to my mind because those long hours spent watching Godard films seemed to suggest a knowledge-driven spectatorship more strongly than repose or diversion (quite apart from the fact that the theater was located in a university town).

In a small theater that felt rather like a classroom, perhaps the smallest of all commercial theaters I have been to, I thus began to have a sense that it might be most apt to think of cinephiles in Seoul as akin to students. Students, that is, who like to distinguish themselves from others by watching abstract and difficult works.

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157 Godard later compiled the series into a single 260-minute feature film.
Thus suspecting a French influence on local cinephiles, I felt fortunate to come across yet another event not long after my visit to the Godard retrospective that affirmed my hunches. While browsing through the programs of the 2008 Chungmuro International Film Festival (CIFF), I learned that there was going to be a roundtable discussion to commemorate the forty years of the Director’s Fortnight, a section that runs parallel to the Cannes Film Festival since 1969 (i.e., after the events of 1968). The talk with the distinguished guests from France was informative—I did not know much about the history of the Director’s Fortnight let alone the Cannes—but the primary purpose of my visit was to see how the audience respond to the talk. Again, feeling rather lucky, I found myself not surprised when a man got up to ask the first question during the Q&A and talked at length about the influence of Godard and Truffaut in the 1960s. Later, another young man in his twenties introduced himself as having come back from a forty-day travel to Paris. He explained, as if to prove himself a serious cinephile, that the purpose of his pilgrimage was to watch movies. He then quoted Bazin in his passionate inquiry about young directors making films in Paris today. A few people did, in fact, get up from their seats when he asked his question in this rather alienating manner. For me, however, it hinted nonetheless at that there was a certain type of if not strong fascination with French cinema and cinephilic history among local cinephiles.

I had gone to the Godard retrospective and the 2008 CIFF before I began my fieldwork at Cinepol. My first impressions about the influence of the French New Wave in South Korean film culture, however, seemed to be right on target. Even a day or two spent on the club’s website was enough to suggest that the members, especially the alumni, share a high regard for

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158 Chungmuro is a major filmmaking district in Seoul.

159 They were Olivier Père, a programmer at the French Cinémathèque and then the head of the Director’s Fortnight (2004-9), and Olivier Jahan, the director of 40 x 15 (2008), which is an homage to the Director’s Fortnight.
the French New Wave. After spending a semester with them as a group, therefore, I began asking the members about the question of the French influence among local cinephiles in loosely structured interviews I conducted on campus benches and in nearby cafes. By this time, I believe, the members considered me a friend(ly older student); and I was confident that they would not withhold their thoughts from me as much as they would have done in the beginning. To my question and to my relief, the members agreed with me without hesitation that I had observed correctly about the romance (hwansang)—a word that I chose to use in the interviews—with French cinema.

Notably, not only did the club members agree readily with the idea of romance with French cinema but they also made direct associations to the French New Wave in their answers although I had not mentioned the latter. Kim-gun who is officially a member of a film club at another university said, for instance, that Leos Carax used to be a sensation [even in his club], something of a scion of the Nouvelle Vague (nubelbagū). Prior to Wong Kar-wai, all art films were French in South Korea due mostly to the legacy of the French New Wave although France produces not a lot that you can call art films these days, he added. He imagined this romance to be associated with the fascination with avant-garde that young people might breed in their rebellious spirit. Another student, Juhee, told me likewise that my question reminded her of a bulky copy of Cahiers du Cinéma that used to lie about in the clubroom although she never opened it to read for herself. She was, in fact, quite critical of the general Francophilia, calling it pretentious (kŏtmŏt). She recounted how she used to feel like she had to go to Seoul Art Cinema, a major cinematheque in the city, to watch art and classical films when she first joined the club as a freshman. From my conversation with her, I learned that she still watches what would be
generally considered art films but not because she feels pressured to or because she classifies them as art films necessarily.

That the club members associated French cinema immediately to the French New Wave when they were given no temporal references seems to prove the postcolonial film critic right in her judgment of the necrophiliac film culture (or at least its long-standing influence) among the art house regulars in South Korea. I must note, however, that the imaginary hierarchical order in which the West is at the top of the cultural ladder seems to be real whether or not cinephiles personally agree with or approve of such a hierarchy. In other words, even if all cinephiles rejected the idea of ascribing prestige to French films based on the national or cultural brand, the global history of colonialism remains real. In the following sections, therefore, I do not mean to slight what Kim would call a colonial legacy even as I discuss how the cinephilic discourse of affect among the club members refutes the idea of consuming film as the “specters of modernity.”

**Affective cinephilia**

One thing I learned from talking with the club members that I would not have guessed easily from observing the audiences at art houses or film festivals alone is that the consumption of art films or any other type is not limited to distinction making. The club members, as a matter of fact, disapproved of the classed experience of film as such. They instead viewed film as a form of art or entertainment that anyone—the category with which they would identify themselves—can appreciate. To put it crudely, it would be quite unlikely for them to watch
Histoire(s), for example, just to be different from others. I rather think that they could not have been any less concerned with making such pointless and wasteful distinction.

In my view, nowhere was the idea of pure appreciation more clearly expressed than in their talk about viewing film as an affective experience. Before I elaborate what I mean by affect, however, I must note first that it is viewing itself that is expressed in an affective language (i.e., “watching this movie is like eating an ice cream cone”) rather than an affective experience that facilitates exegesis of a particular text (i.e., “I could almost taste the ice cream in that scene.”). In other words, I draw attention to cinephilia itself more than text as the object of which meaning is made in the talk of the club members. The reason why I have made up the example of eating here, moreover, is that the body is often the site of affective cinephilia for the club members. In the humanities, body has been likewise at the center of affect studies, two “dominant vectors” of which are: “Silvan Tomkins’s psychobiology of differential affects … and Gilles Deleuze’s Spinozist ethology of bodily capacities” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 5). Tomkins, on the one hand, defines “affective responses [as] the primary motives of human beings,” which come as “a consequence of his evolution” (Tomkins 1995: 217; 476). Affect, in this case, is the drive of “everyman” for whom it is “the bottom line for thought as well as perception and behavior” (51). Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth call this “a quasi-Darwinian ‘innate-ist’ bent toward matters of evolutionary hardwiring” (5). Deleuze’s Spinozist rendition of affect, on the other hand, foregrounds the multiplicity of relations between bodies and objects where “affect [is] an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman” (6).

The direction I take to discuss affective cinephilia is closer to the latter, which is the foundation for Brian Massumi’s (1995) first influential publication on affect. Massumi explains Spinoza as follows:
Spinoza defined the body in terms of “relations of movement and rest.” He wasn’t referring to actual, extensive movements or stases. He was referring to a body’s capacity to enter into relations of movement and rest. This capacity he spoke of as a power (or potential) to affect or be affected. The issue, after sensation, perception and memory, is affect. (Massumi 2002: 15, original italics)

The words that Massumi highlights signify affect as “promise,” what Seigworth and Gregg call the “‘not yet’ of ‘knowing the body’” that belongs to a world of “forces of encounters” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 2-3, 12). Affect, in other words, presupposes a relationship in which power is exercised and experienced (see also Shouse 2005). Likewise, by affective cinephilia, I mean the “not yet” of the encounter between a cinephile and film: the chemistry, if you will, between the two (that is also contingent upon other variables). What I have found in the talk of the club members is, likewise, this very near physical and chemical relationship that is expressed retrospectively. It is not, therefore, the mere emotional (i.e., “this movie makes me sad”) or physical (i.e., “this movie gives me goose bumps”) reaction that I am interested in (see Gunning 1990). By affective cinephilia, I do not, moreover, mean film phenomenology—cognitive perception of film’s vision by a lived-body—or haptic visuality—embodied visuality that mimics our memories of touch, however holistically synaesthetic and synoptic these might be (see Sobchack 1992; Marks 2000). As I have stressed above, I would suggest instead that cinephiles find in the various metonyms of affect the language to give qualitative meaning and significance to how they come in contact with and relate to film.

As far as methodology goes, furthermore, I also adapt Massumi’s approach that rejects what he calls “grid-lock” of “oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on” (Massumi 2002: 2-3).

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160 According to Seigworth and Gregg, “In what undoubtedly has become one of the most oft-cited quotations concerning affect, Baruch Spinoza maintained, ‘No one has yet determined what the body can do’ (1959: 87)” (3).

161 In his essay, Tom Gunning (1986) has introduced what he calls the cinema of attractions—voyeuristic and exhibitionist films—of the early silent era that elicit bodily reactions from the spectator. See also Linda Williams (1991) for the “body genres” of excess.
For Massumi, this creates a “cultural freeze-frame” to which adding movement (affect) “is about as easy as multiplying a number by zero and getting a positive product” (3). Rather than using the analytical categories of age, gender, class, ethnicity, geography, and so on, I follow closely the words of the club members to discuss the cultural implications of their cinephilia. The result would, therefore, be at odds with that which illuminates sociologically, for instance, why young women in their early twenties with disposable income watch romantic comedies in urban areas. I instead discuss, as I have noted so far, how these cinephiles relate to cinema and what kind of meaning their affective cinephilia implicates. This, however, is not to brush off what Lawrence Grossberg calls “the non-homogeneous totality of the context” (Grossberg 2010: 323). For him, following Raymond Williams, this conjuncture is inseparable from the structure of feeling where he locates affect (313-327). As Grossberg says rather lightheartedly, “As I said, I don’t know yet how to organize such a project” (324), I do not pretend to have laid out all the totality of the context in which to complicate the contemporary moment of the film club. I would ask the readers, however, to bear in mind the previous chapters on the historical moment in which the club members are both technologically savvy cinephiles who have received, directly and indirectly, the cinephilic traditions of the previous generations of cinephiles, as well as, twenty-somethings living as precarious neoliberal subjects in today’s South Korea as what Grossberg calls the non-homogenous (near) totality of the context.

The taste (*mat*) and feeling (*nŭkkim*) of film

In general, I encountered the discourse of pure appreciation mostly in terms of the “taste” (*mat*) and “feeling” (*nŭkkim*) that the club members often spoke of. I consider these words to
illustrate the affective nature of spectatorship as they index the contact that anticipates influence between the film and the viewer. The Korean word *mat*, first, signifies primarily the sensation of food on the tongue as well as the general feeling about an object or phenomenon. What it does not denote, however, is the discerned preference as in the case of English. The word *nükkim*, likewise, indicates physical, emotional, or intuitive sensations and experiences. Reasonably synonymous to each other, these words then point to how each viewer experiences film personally as in mind and body.

To experience film affectively as such is, for Jun, a “pure” (*sansuhada*) way to watch movies. The topic arose during an interview when we happened to talk about using *Film Art* in the club (see chapter 3). Jun had said that there were things both to gain and to lose by adhering to doing the structural analysis as a group. When asked for an example of the lost things, he answered with the following words.

I mean the kind of appreciation with pure (*sansuhada*) purpose that I had been doing from the past. For instance, there is a saying that I like. Let’s say that [reading] a poem is comparable to eating a fruit. It is good to know what kind of symbolism and whatnots are used in the poem. What is better, however, is to know how delicious (*mat*) it is when I take a bite. When it comes to movies, I don’t have to know much but to know if I like it. Then it becomes a good movie. […]

The gist of Jun’s view on the surface regardless of his comparison of film to poetry is that what matters in watching a movie comes down simply to whether or not one likes it. What I find interesting, in particular, is the way in which Jun compares the process of getting to know his preference to eating. The judgment of taste, as it were, in this case is based not on what a film critic might say or what others say they like. The emotional attributes that he finds likeable or dislikable in a movie (e.g., fear or love) likewise are not at the center of discourse here. He instead takes into account, if figuratively, his involuntary response to the bodily experience of consuming film. He comes to know his “taste,” in other words, through an affective experience of consumption as such that involves making a foreign substance a part of himself. It is, in a
manner of speaking, as ordinary as eating an apple. It is in this sense cinephilia can be almost classless as opposed to classed in experience (the latter of which comes with the baggage of postcolonial conundrums).

Junsu, an alumnus, also talks about how film becomes a part of himself in the following excerpt from an interview. This time, I had made a comment in relation to using Film Art that more members than I expected seemed to care more for what they feel about than what they read in a movie. Junsu agreed, adding that it all comes down to what you see in a movie yourself, and talked about his own feelings when he comes across a movie that he likes.

Me? The movies that I like the most, they all have certain feelings (nükkim). I know when I like a movie if I feel like putting it in my pocket and taking it with me everywhere I go. Then I just have to reach for my pocket whenever I want to see it. I like movies that make me feel this way. What catches my eyes here is precisely how the word feeling that Junsu uses is not quite a referent for abstract emotions such as happiness or sadness. He intimates instead an affect of a near physical nature in his description of the actions that the unspecified feelings inspire in him. Movies become, in this way, an extension of his body in his wishful imagination of folding them neatly into his pocket to reach for later when he feels like seeing them again. While it is not my intention to render him a cyborg, I do consider this near prosthetic imagination at the level of identification or the fashioning of the self (see McLuhan 1964). In Junsu, movies are a bodily or personal affair, a part of himself beyond a brief encounter at the theater. Junsu is, moreover, not alone in identifying with movies in such a private manner. One of the most memorable of conversations that I had with the club members is when Kim-gun said, “I am cinema” (nanŭn yŏnghwada). This had been the reason why he joined a film club in the first place upon entering university. While his words imply mainly that film means the greatest to him, the syntagma of this simple sentence reveals how intimately a cinephile can identify with motion picture that moves at twenty-four frames a second.
That cinephiles prefer an intimate experience of film even in their bodies, on the one hand, is not a new revelation. From the early days of cinephilia (i.e., 1920s), physicality has been central to the cinephilic lexicon such as *photogénie*, which in Jean Epstein, for instance, has provoked “needles in skin, vertigo, centrifugal motion, [and] bodily cravings” (Keathley 2006: 100). What I consider significant in the talk of the club members, on the other hand, is the (historical) moment in which cinephiles recognize increasingly and openly the importance of pure appreciation in watching movies. For a few decades, South Korean cinephiles have subscribed quite heavily to theory-driven practice, an example of which I illustrated in chapter 3. The change that has taken place is precisely that the affective experience of film now complements the near-scientific and distanced relationship to film. Affect as such is not a contradiction to the club activities in which the analytical is still an important aspect. The language of affect, as I continue discussing in the following sections, provides them with a way to express and to give meaning to the relationship between film and viewer, something that is off limits to the formalistic study of film as a text.

*Film as an “unsalted dish” and a “pop in the ears”*

In the course of talking and listening to the club members, I had been at sea for quite a while regarding their frequent use of the words taste and feeling precisely because I had been discovering the Bordwell regime at the same time. It was when I talked to Seyun, a second year

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162 Another important term that refers to the affective spectatorial experience is *jouissance*, which Christian Keathley (2006) in his discussion of the “cinephiliac moment” identifies as the “fetishistic, bodily experience of pleasure” (34). Unlike other terms such as *photogénie* (see Epstein 1921) or *auteur* (see Truffaut 1954), *jouissance* (see Barthes 1975) sets itself apart by not requiring special talents or eyes that see what others cannot see. See also Barthes (1981) for more on *punctum*, which Keathley discusses in conjunction with *jouissance*.
female student, that I finally took fortuitously the last step to understanding that the students use the words to express their experiential and affective relationship to film.

Seyun and I, however, were not talking about taste or feeling at all. Seyun happened to use a metaphor for taste when she was asked to talk about art and French film. What I learned from Seyun, as well as Lee below, is that they watch art films because they can experience different tastes and affect that regular blockbusters rarely offer. I speculate, in this regard, that they would watch so-called art films regardless of what they are called. The classification of art film either in filmic or geopolitical categories would not matter much to cinephiles with a healthy appetite for film.

In the interview with Seyun, I did not ask whether she agreed with my impressions about cinephiles having a romantic idea of French film as I had asked previously in my interviews with the club members. I instead changed the direction of my question and asked her to explain what makes French or art films different from others in her view. I modified my question because, by this time, I was quite convinced that the club members did not watch art films only to be snobbish and different from others. Yet the task of defining art film or French film was perhaps a mean favor that I asked for as Cinepol is the kind of a group that rarely settles for a reductive definition when it comes to discussing filmic terms such as realism. During the conversation, as a matter of fact, she told me that the following is for the sake of coming up with a definition or description of what might constitute a “French” film.

Seyun: In *After Midnight* [Italy],\(^{163}\) the main character is a 16mm film projectionist by hobby […] One of the narrations goes like, “He wants to return to the pure cinema.” He is the kind of guy who dreams of making film out of the everyday. Just like the Lumière Brothers did even before anyone saw cinema as an entertainment, before all the action flicks and blockbusters. This narration pierced me like a nail. It made me wonder if the everyday can be turned into movies without embellishments (*kkumida*), just like in the days of the Lumière Brothers. Of course, all movies are fictions, but French[-like] movies might be the closest to this. […]

\(^{163}\) *Dopo mezzanotte* (Davide Ferrario, 2004)
Josie: What do you mean when you say that American movies are too ornamented (changsikjŏk)?
Seyun: Ah, just blockbusters? I am really fond of Gus Van Sant [an American director]. […] How should I describe his movies? If they are food, they’d make unsalted dishes, mild to taste (simsimhada).

In her description of what might meet the criteria of a French film, I believe she was deliberate in choosing non-French examples. This is why I have taken the liberty to add “-like” to the word French in my translation of Seyun’s words. Mirroring how Kim-gun said with a bit of exaggeration that all art films have been French in South Korea in the past, the word French connotes perhaps the style of what is conventionally considered an art film more strongly than the film’s national brand when used in such a colloquial manner.

Seyun most likely came to be able to articulate the difference in the styles of art film from those of blockbusters from years of watching movies at Seoul Art Cinema. She has been a regular at the cinematheque since she was a high school student because, according to her, the selections there offer her different tastes that she rarely finds in blockbusters. In the case of After Midnight, for instance, she returned to the theater for a total of seven times so that she can watch it while it is on the big screen. One might wonder the nature of pleasure of watching a movie that is as insipid (“mild to taste”) as an “unsalted dish.” I suggest, however, that enjoying an unsalted dish speaks figuratively of the desire to experience the fundamentals of cinema—what makes a film a film. It is as you would taste the flavor of the ingredients in a dish when it is not beset with sauces and seasonings. Seyun’s reference to the Lumière Brothers in this sense seems most fitting as the magic of Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (1896) was conjured up simply by the camera, light, and movement.

Besides Seyun, many students join Cinepol with years of experience in watching art films. There are, however, also as many students who come across art films after joining the club. Director Lee is one of the members who was similarly compelled to watch art and classical films
upon joining the group. In the following excerpt from an interview, Lee speaks of the shock that he received when he listened to his peers talking about the kind of movies that he, a self-identified cinephile, had never heard of before.

First of all, the movies I used to watch [before college] were mostly Hollywood films. [...] Then I joined Cinepol and heard about *The 400 Blows* [François Truffaut, 1959] for the first time in my life. I kid you not, the members of my own class knew so much about movies. [...] I used to think I like and watch a lot of movies, but I could not even butt in when we talked. [...] Then you know one of those “100-movies” lists. I resolved to watch all of the movies on that list. [...] To be frank, I sometimes had to force myself to watch. Then, one day, it “popped,” like when your ears pop suddenly and get English after hours of seemingly meaningless listening.

Lee’s decision to select a quintessential French New Wave film to illustrate his venture into art film, on the one hand, might signify his encounter with the necrophiliac spectatorship that the postcolonial critic objected to above. It is indeed a peculiar thing that high school students who were to enter university around 2004 had watched old French movies especially when the popularity of the New Korean Cinema was at its height. Lee’s explanation that follows, however, shows that watching films such as *The 400 Blows* is something entirely different from a pretentious Francophilia at least for him as a college student participating in a film club.

For Lee, *The 400 Blows* is the most typical of the movies in the “100-movies” list while all such lists are bound to include Hollywood classics such as *Casablanca* or *The Godfather* series. I speculate that he singled out the film in order to give a readily recognizable example that does not follow the dominant form of narrative cinema as one of the most defining characteristics of Hollywood—what he used be most familiar with—is its narrative centeredness. If Hollywood films are comparable to his native tongue, effortless and easy, he found films of other styles to be rather like foreign languages to his ears after having been desensitized to movies that conceal the filmic apparatus to serve the purposes of narrative continuity by a long

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164 This was the only group interview I had done. Most of the ellipses refer to the interjections and comments in the three-way conversation. The other interviewee was Jun, a close friend of Lee, who compared watching movies to eating fruit as quoted above.
exposure to Hollywood. The pop in his ears after hours of listening to English for nothing, in this sense, seems to mark the moment in which he saw something beyond narrative in film. I daresay, in fact, that his experience is quite comparable to Seyun’s. Lee must have seen in films like *The 400 Blows* not only the story but also how the narrative is constructed with the camera, light, and movements. That Lee compares his experience of watching films such as *The 400 Blows* to a loud pop in his ears is, in this sense, noteworthy because his language points precisely to an affect that is experienced in an existential way that involves the entire person (i.e., mind and body) of the cinephile.

After Lee mentioned *The 400 Blows*, I remembered the shock that I received when I got around to watching the film alone at my rented flat during fieldwork. The *400 Blows* and *The Dreamers* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 2003) were a couple of films that I had to watch for myself as I heard the club members mention them by name quite often. Before watching the film, however, I had not a lot of expectations because, at the time, I had seen quite a number of French New Wave films including those by Truffaut himself and loved some but not so much others (I mostly watched whatever was available for a loan at the University of Illinois library on a day-to-day basis). After enjoying the movie in quite a placid state of mind, however, there came a moment when an off-screen action stood out to me more than what went on in the diegesis.

At the end of the film, in a state of complete arrest, I almost felt like I knew what the camera was feeling—not just seeing through its lens—as it followed Antoine (the young Jean-Pierre Léaud) on the deserted beach. I imagined the anthropomorphic camera not as shooting the boy but running with and cheering him on in a way that no person ever had. When the frame

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165 I include my own story as a token of my belonging to the club as a member, a principle that I had as a researcher (see chapter 2).

166 The film tells a story of three cinephiles set against the time of the Paris student riots in 1968.
finally came to a standstill, I felt as if I was “pierced,” not just to borrow Seyun’s word. The ending was special because this was the first time that I saw (or imagined) humanity in the movement of the camera. I say of the camera because it was not necessarily the intention of the director but the movement of the apparatus that I identified with. This experience—although it also involves an experience that is akin to film phenomenology per Vivian Sobchack beyond affective cinephilia that I have been discussing—implicated not just my mind but also my body. I could not agree more with their insistence that anyone can enjoy movies as all it takes is yourself because I had experienced it myself. In this way, watching a film to acquire some nondescript modernity cannot but be a pretense, a waste of time, really, if one loved film itself.

An “(un)balanced diet” in film

There are certainly students who watch art films more often than others while some students prefer mainstream blockbusters. It is, however, the general consensus that one needs to watch film in a balanced manner (*kolgoru*) in order to be a well-rounded cinephile. The word *kolgoru* can be used for any situation, but it is often used in the context of having a healthy diet (*kolgoru mŏkta*). The first step to healthy film spectatorship starts likewise by realizing one’s biased taste or “unbalanced diet” (*p’yŏnsik*) in movies. *P’yŏnsik* in Korean refers primarily to being a picky eater, most often used to describe children’s eating behavior that needs correction. I have, in fact, heard enough number of the club members making critical comments on watching movies in such a biased manner.

One student, in particular, repeated the word *p’yŏnsik* twice in her written response to my interview questions as in the following excerpt. This was the only interview that I conducted in
writing although I corresponded with other students via e-mail on many occasions. I think, however, that I gained something new from this written interview because Yewon, the writer, provided a written composition that requires a slightly more or different kind of organization and deliberation than when students responded to my questions spontaneously in a relatively casual setting. In other words, I imagine that the word $p\, 'yŏnsik$ is part of a deliberate choice on her part to express her opinions more efficiently in short paragraphs. In the first quote, Yewon talks about the movies that she likes; and in the second, the most memorable group study meeting that she remembers.

1) The first director I ever liked is Tim Burton. […] When I was a high school student, I fell in love with the movies of Michel Gondry after watching *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* [2004]. […] I also looked up the movies written by Charlie Kaufman who scripted *Eternal*. I like movies that are relatively bright; have fairytale-like qualities; and offer social commentaries. I would say that I accept most movies without being too picky ($p\, 'yŏnsik$) except for horror or violent movies.

2) I remember being impressed by Shinu’s group study on *Severed* [Carl Bessai, 2005]. His discussion raised in me a little bit of interest in horror movies in which I had absolutely no interest before because of my distaste ($p\, 'yŏnsik$) in the genre; and it also helped me to watch horror movies with less fear. Especially, the clips that Shinu edited for discussion were helpful for understanding the film. Perhaps for its violent images, I remember this group study meeting the best.

I gather from Yewon’s response that she came to recognize the need to balance her diet in film after having spent time in a community of cinephiles. It goes without saying that Yewon, as a high school student who searched for other works by Gondry or Kaufman, did not think twice about what she prefers or likes in movies. It would have been rather unnatural for her to think of herself as a picky eater then. The sense of a lack crossed her mind when she realized that she missed out by choosing not to watch certain movies because of her (dis)likings in certain genres and styles. I would say, in this regard, that the judgment of an unbalanced diet in film registers in one’s mind when one interacts with other cinephiles as such.

Shinu, an avid horror fan, has written on the club’s web board that he decided to use *Severed*, a film that he called “below B,” in order to dissect horror as a genre during the group
study meeting. If I could rephrase his words in light of the previous chapter, Shinu deliberately chose an example of a “bad movie” so that it becomes easier for them to scrutinize the structural elements (rather than the stories) of a horror film objectively and at a distance. His choice was, in turn, rewarded in the form of a fun meeting as well as learning the value of having a balanced diet in film. Expanding one’s filmic repertoire, in this way, exposes one to different kind of affects and experiences that are specific to the film medium. Only by means of such cinephilic muscle training, moreover, one becomes a healthy spectator who is able to communicate with others and appreciate what one does not but others do like.

It does not mean, however, that watching movies that one is indifferent to or unfamiliar with is an easy task, as it was for Director Lee above. A number of the club members, in fact, talked about the pressure to watch canonical films to which the previous generations of the club members devoted many of their study meetings. Mina, a first year student, for instance, told me that she backed out of the club for a semester when the first meeting she ever attended at the beginning of a school year was on the semiotics of *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960). She must have felt out of place with the unfamiliar topic and the unconventional filmmaking of Godard. Balancing one’s diet in film, in this way, is not simply a matter of watching different genres of film. At the same time, classical and art (i.e., old and difficult) films are not the only prescription for those who seek a balanced diet in film. A few of the club members critiqued, for instance, how some are less likely to watch movies of the more popular styles, having already decided that certain movies are not worth their time often without giving them a chance.

The point I am trying to make here, however, is not that the club members go back to their own taste in spite of their knowledge of the importance of having a balanced diet in film. What is significant is the criticism itself of an unbalanced diet whether or not the club members
find it easy to watch a wide array of movies. Today, the club still uses canonical films but is increasingly open to using unlikely films for the group study meetings. One such instance was when a student selected *Dumb & Dumber* (Peter Farrelly, 1994) to study comedy as a genre for one of the meetings. It was commented on the web board that this was the most shocking choice ever made in the history of Cinepol. Despite a lot of smirks that followed online, however, the incident shows that the club itself as well as the club members is making efforts to widen their tastes and interests and that they know they have things to learn and experience from all films as different as *Breathless* and *Dumb & Dumber*.

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I have suggested above that the language of affect is an antithesis of the theory driven cinephilia that has been dominant for a few decades in South Korea. One of the earlier signs of this change was perhaps the end of the publication of *Kino*, the monthly film magazine that was known for its heavy use of film theories, in 2003. South Korean cinephiles not only read it religiously but also studied film theories in order to understand what the magazine had to say. Today, in contrast, a considerable portion of cinephiles do not even read *Cine21*, one of the most popular film magazines that has survived to this day.

It is, however, more difficult to give a definitive explanation as to the cultural logic behind how affective cinephilia, instead of the social, came to complement theory at least in a group that is as small as a university film club. It is, in fact, a historically and socially conscious film spectatorship that Kim calls for in her critical essay that I introduced early in the chapter. For the 386-generation\textsuperscript{167} film scholar, national cinema, for instance, should relate to the national community (*minjok kongdongch’e*) and national sensibilities (*minjok chŏngsŏ*), all informed by

\textsuperscript{167} This is the generation that is known mostly for having been heavily involved in social activism during the 1980s as university students (see chapter 2).
history and politics (224). I gather that, for Kim, the more desirable form of spectatorship would likewise deal with social or at least political interests and questions. The difficulty is precisely that it is rather tricky to fathom from her essay how Kim would advise today’s cinephiles to make sense of films such as *The 400 Blows* or *Breathless* except as historical documents that carry certain political significance.

All things considered, however, it would be unfair to say definitively that this generation of cinephiles reproduces the colonial legacies that persist in the imaginary hierarchy of cultural texts in global circulation. The everyday language of the club members offers instead a window to see how cinephiles with distinctly cosmopolitan tastes point to the complex power dynamics in the postcolonial world. We never know, in other words, what exactly is going on even as we think we know what it indexes to have a text circulate across borders until we look at it more closely. The young men whom I listened to at the roundtable for the Director’s Fortnight likewise could have been those who watch French movies for the sake of the pure enjoyment of film. It would be, of course, ill-advised to make cultural heroes out of the club members. Their cinephile discourse, however, indicates that the postcolonial habitus is not permanent or absolute. The language of affect reveals, for one, an attitude that does not privilege one text over another based on the national or continental brand of film. Modernity, moreover, is most likely the least of their worries. The primary object in watching movies for them is to experience—to be affected by—the many different facets of film. This, for me, is as legitimate as any other way of being a healthy cinephile.
If chapters 3 and 4 presented a micro view of cosmopolitan cinephilia, in chapter 5, I consider a macro view of cosmopolitan cinephilia as an economic practice that implicates a different kind of sociocultural significance. In particular, I examine how the term “diversity” is intertwined with the notion of consumer choice in film culture, making diversity a politically charged expression of cosmopolitan cinephilia. The specific case I examine is the incident of an audience campaign to save Seoul Art Cinema from government interference in 2009 where cinephiles—as consumers who have the right to choice at the theaters—mobilized the locution of diversity as a rhetorical device in defense of their cosmopolitan tastes and the cinemathque.
Chapter Five

Local Cinephiles, Cosmopolitan Cinephilia

In the previous chapter, I considered the affective experience of film that fosters cosmopolitan tastes in cinephiles. In this chapter, I relate cosmopolitan taste to the concept of diversity (tayangsŏng), which is perhaps the most important term that has currency in the collective lexicon of cinephiles in South Korea of late. I see diversity in film, on the one hand, as a politicized term for cosmopolitan tastes as it mirrors the familiar cultural ideal that celebrates difference and encourages the tolerance of multiplicity as it has been advocated in the politics of multiculturalism in South Korea (see Choo 2006; Kim E. 2008; Kim H. 2007). I would argue, on the other hand, that diversity indexes consumer rights to choice—a different name for diversity—in the market (i.e., at the theater). The first part of this chapter as such will consider the double meanings of cultural multiplicity and consumer logic in the notion of diversity that are, in my view, quite porous and closely related to each other.

I then examine the dual significance of diversity through the particular case of the crisis of Seoul Art Cinema. Often called simply as the cinematheque (sinemat’ek ’ū), Seoul Art Cinema is regarded as a school for cinephiles that offers a wide range of services from retrospectives of film masters to lectures by local critics and scholars year-round. The discourse of diversity in film has been arguably the most vocal among cinephiles concerning the cinematheque when the Korean Film Council (KOFIC), an auxiliary partner of the cinematheque, made a unilateral decision to privatize it in 2009 arguably as a part of the government effort to control ideological oppositions (i.e., communist). Evoking the Langlois Affair (1968), local cinephiles organized a campaign to collect signatures in support of the cinematheque while
refusing the government the ownership of Seoul Art Cinema. In light of the campaign and the
talk of the supporters of the cinemathèque, I argue that local cinephiles have mobilized, however
inadvertently, the rhetoric of diversity as that which speaks to both cultural and economic ideals
against the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008-2012), one of whose highest principles is to
guard the free market economy (i.e., the very choice in the market). This is one of the ways in
which I see cinephiles as local consumers whose cosmopolitan tastes play out in their defense of
cultural multiplicity and their practice of neoliberal common sense at the grassroots level.

The dual meanings of diversity

If I had to choose a single term of greatest political significance in film culture that I
came across during my fieldwork, it would be diversity (tayangsŏng). Whenever I encountered
the term, I imagined the political weight of the value of cultural difference and tolerance that
rationalizes cosmopolitan tastes and the desire for more choice in film. I have, in fact, read quite
a few times in film magazines that the audience wishes to make the choice for themselves rather
than to have the choice made for them by the theaters. The most incisive of all critiques on the
lack of choice at the theaters I have seen to date is perhaps the words of filmmaker Jeon Jae-hong,
known as the “boy Kim Ki-duk,” who said rather with a righteous indignation that “South Korea
has a communist regime when it comes to cinema” (Harper’s Bazaar Korea, May 2008: 384).
Jeon complains that all theaters play the same movies and that there is no diversity to speak of—
such that it all amounts to indoctrination. The demand for diversity as such, on the one hand, is
well justified as it is a supply-driven market that cinephiles who share cosmopolitan tastes
protest against.
As much as the call for correction is justified, however, it is equally understandable that producers, distributors, and theaters prefer, and rightly so, profitable movies. South Korea, indeed, is not a communist country where cinema is the business of the regime. The question of economics beyond the consumer choice, in fact, is not to be considered lightly when diversity in film culture is concerned. To put it simply, having diversity only for its sake is a romantic ideal as it means, for those who labor to bring diversity in film culture, a livelihood. Kim-gun whose roommate works at an independent film distributor, in fact, placed the value of diversity second to the means of the living of the people who work in the film industry. His view on the idea of diversity in film culture as a pathway to bourgeois habits—of which he would be guilty of enjoying, by the way—also seems to have been born out of his resentment at the reality that a close friend of his barely makes a thousand dollars a month (a million KRW) when he works full time at a respectable company.

I have mentioned above that I had imagined a close tie between the cultural ideal and the consumer logic in the notion of diversity. I eased myself from having reservations about my hypothesis when I happened to peruse the website of Artplus Cinema Network (hereafter, Artplus), the development of which I have broached in the Introduction. Artplus, according to its website, is an alliance of theaters that have partnered to bring diversity to film culture. As of 2011, thirty two screens at twenty seven theaters nationwide participate in the network. What caught my attention while reading the introduction was the term “diversity film” (tayangsŏng yŏnghwaja). I had rarely heard if ever any of the club members mention diversity film by name whereas I took notice regularly of the need for diversity in film (yŏnghwaja ŭi tayangsŏng) in their talk. Diversity film, however, was a category in its own right in the words of Artplus. It is, to wit, an alternative to feature length commercial films and, as such, encompasses a wide variety
of narratives, genres, forms, and production styles ranging from art to animated films. In these particular terms, the audience is invited to the purely cultural dimension of diversity film.

All things considered, however, the selfsame virtues of diversity film suggest an economic logic that positions the audience as consumers—more specifically as those entitled to consumer rights—as Artplus claims in the following.

The audience has the right to choose the films they watch. The audience should be free to eat from a diverse selection of side dishes, that is, movies regardless of their commercial or artistic orientation. We (uri) audience, however, have long been restricted in our freedom, far from enjoying our rights.

What is noteworthy here is the particular way in which Artplus uses the rhetoric of diversity in giving the cinephile an extra identity of a consumer. That is to say, in its comparison of movies to side dishes, an ordinary part of the everyday Korean fare, Artplus manages to furnish diversity film with an impression of the mundane that it, after all, would be only right to be able to enjoy the regular treats as such. Watching diversity film is thus presented not as a matter of having an acquired taste but as an ordinary experience denied to the audience. The cultural and economic values in the notion of diversity as such are therefore quite difficult to separate neatly from one another.

Artplus, moreover, blurs the division between the theaters and audience by employing the word “uri” (we). To note, it would be equally correct to translate uri as “South Korean” since it is often used to signify the imagined collectivity of the Koreans. I chose instead to translate uri as “we,” a much smaller collectivity that suggests an imagined coalition between the audience and the network theaters. It is true that, be it coalitional or not, one of the central purposes of Artplus must be to make a profitable commodity out of diversity film. I chose, however, to

168 http://www.artpluscn.or.kr/cms/19.do

169 Ibid.
highlight the coalitional nature of the relationship between the theaters and audience as it is most likely the case that Artplus must present itself as politically correct and desirable by identifying its cause with the audience’s rights to have choice precisely for the sake of the business. Diversity film, in this way, bears an equal share of cultural and economic burdens on all fronts.

**The crisis of Seoul Art Cinema**

The matter of diversity in film culture has been for years an important part of cinephilic discourse since the rise of the New Korean Cinema and the subsequent marginalization of non-mainstream films (see Introduction). In recent years, diversity has once again emerged as a political language of cinephiles particularly over the issue of the crisis of Seoul Art Cinema. As the only non-profit cinematheque in Seoul, it hosts film festivals, retrospectives, various monthly programs, and educational seminars and symposiums to the public, illustrations of which have been included throughout the dissertation. The root of the crisis that I discuss below is that the cinematheque has been managed in part with the financial support of the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) that is entrusted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Seoul Art Cinema has previously survived a series of crises over its budget and location. It faced, however, the biggest crisis yet when KOFIC attempted to replace the executive body of the cinematheque with a new private (i.e., government-friendly) party chosen through a public contest. The failed attempts were made twice in February 2009 and a year later

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in 2010.\textsuperscript{171} It was, in fact, rather fortunate for Seoul Art Cinema to have the incident end as a potential threat. In 2010, KOFIC closed down Indie Space, the former independent film theater commission, and replaced MediAct, the former public film production commission, with an executive board that organized just ten days prior to the public contest. The hurried manner in which KOFIC changed the leadership of various film commissions, according to journalists, was all part of a nationwide “red purge” in the film industry.\textsuperscript{172} Red scare has been one of the principal weapons of the Lee administration in all areas of governance although it is difficult to tell whether it has a sincere faith in the danger of communism as all oppositional voice have been labeled indiscriminately a “commie” (ppalgaengi). That the government has practically turned the political clock back to the time of military regimes itself, however, is now nearly commonsensical in South Korea today.

In the cultural sphere, it has been the Munhwa Mirae Forum (hereafter, Forum), a rather secretive society of intellectuals and artists not without a tie to the New Right (nyurait’ŭ) movement, that machinated and executed the red purge. The New Right represents a particular group of neo-conservatives in South Korea whose thoughts are marked by neoliberal economics and liberal views on history and international relations. The Forum, a neo-conservative establishment as such, had been in operation prior to the appointment of the Lee administration;

\textsuperscript{171} See, for example, Kang, Pyŏngjin, The controversy over the open contest for the Cinematheque [Sinemat'ek’ŭ saŏp kongmoje nollan], Cine21 (24 February 2009); Kim, Yongŏn, KOFIC in crisis [2011-nyŏn yŏnghwa pach’ŏn kikŭm yesanan munje ro p’urŏ pon wigi ŭi Yŏngjinwi], Cine21 (2 December 2010); Paek, Kŏnyŏng, Save the Seoul Art Cinema, our cinematheque [Uri ŭi sinemat’ek’ŭ, Sŏul At’ŭ Sinema rŭl chik’yŏra], Neoimages (16 February 2009). \texttt{http://www.neoimages.co.kr/news/view/2088} (all accessed in March 2011)

it, however, became more famously known as the cultural gestapo (*keshut ’ap ’o*) and the firebase of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism during the term of Lee’s office.\(^{173}\)

As it turns out, it was the Forum that ordered and organized the red purge in the film industry.\(^{174}\) In the petition that the Forum has submitted to the head of the National Assembly Standing Committee of the leading Grand National Party, in particular, the first line reads: “Cinema has been at the leading center of the leftist cultural movements during the terms of Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008).”\(^{175}\) The crisis that Seoul Art Cinema faced was, in this way, not a simple matter of finding the most effective hands to run the cinematheque but, in effect, a fight against an ideologically biased government that sought rigorously a complete control over cultural institutions.

**A Langlois Affair in Seoul**

A particular illogic, a glaring problem therefore, in KOFIC’s decision to impose a public contest to replace the executive body of Seoul Art Cinema was that it was not in a position to hand over the management to a government-friendly private third party. Seoul Art Cinema was established by public effort in the first place whereas KOFIC served as a venue of partial funding (30% of the total budget) for the cinematheque. When a group of cinephiles launched a

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\(^{174}\) It is, moreover, no secret that Cho Hee-mun, a former chairman of KOFIC who orchestrated the open contest system in 2009, is the founder of the Forum. Kang Hansŏp, another former chairman of KOFIC who was the first to propose the open contest system for Seoul Art Cinema, used to be a member of the Forum.

\(^{175}\) The photograph of a portion of this document is available in Sŏng, *ibid* (*Ohmynews*, 23 March 2010).
signature campaign in response, it was precisely the invalidity of KOFIC that they brought first to the attention of the supporters of the cinemathque.\(^{176}\)

The reader may remember from chapter 1 the series of short stories featured in a non-profit film magazine called *Pilsa*. At the editorial staff meeting that I visited in February 2009, I learned that Kang Minyŏng, the co-editor in chief, was responsible for initiating the campaign. At this meeting, I received a handout that appeals to a concerted effort to defend Seoul Art Cinema against the scandalous affair brought around by KOFIC. KOFIC as such was named the principal culprit of the undue offense in the campaign statement. A closer look at the campaign statement, however, reveals that it targets a problem that is more deep-seated than the immediate demand of KOFIC. In short, it accuses, however discreetly, the government of using red scare not unlike how a number of journalists have argued.

On the other side of the statement in the handout is an extra narrative of how cinephiles have responded to different crises throughout history. Divided into three parts, the short chronicle reviews three events: the Langlois Affair of 1968; the closing of Chungmuro Intermedia Playground (hereafter, Playground; Hwallŏk Yŏn’guso) in 2003; and the current crisis of Seoul Art Cinema in 2009. Calling each of the first two events “curiously familiar,” the campaign writers ask what will happen to Seoul Art Cinema.

Of the two references, the Langlois Affair is perhaps an intuitive choice for situating the predicament of the cinemathque in a larger picture. The Langlois Affair is not only well known among South Korean cinephiles—it is, in fact, remembered in general as “cinephilia’s finest hour” to this day (Keathley 2006: 27)—but the proceedings of the event had been, as the

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\(^{176}\) This is quite apart from the fact that they refuse rightfully government intrusion whereas the government assistance so far has been taken for granted. On the sources of funding of the cinemathque, see Kim Sŏnguk, ibid., *Korea Media Rating Board* 64 (2004): 8-12; Chŏn, Min’gyu. 2009. Interview with Kim Hongnok, the director of the Seoul Art Cinema [Kim Hongnok samugukchang int’ŏbyu]. *Pilsa* 19: 22-27.
campaign writers say, also curiously familiar. In February 1968, Parisians, joined by cinephiles from all around the world, protested against the de Gaulle regime over the decision to replace Henri Langlois, the co-founder of the Cinémathèque Française, with a government-friendly bureaucrat. KOFIC’s announcement must have rung a bell with the supporters of Seoul Art Cinema when a similar attempt was made to replace the executive board of their cinemateque.

The second of the references regarding the closing of Playground, however, is narrated more subtly but, as such, bears greater political significance. Playground located at the Ch’ungmuro Station opened to the public in November 2001 as a part of the city’s plan to build cultural space in Seoul’s subway system. The Office of Culture appointed the Association of Korean Independent Film & Video (KIFV) as the commission to oversee public film education at Playground. In the next thirteen months before it closed down, the membership grew to about 13,000 people, 434 of which received training in film production and hosted 12 public exhibitions. A regular number of visitors also used the book and film libraries each month.177 Curiously, however, the campaign narrative does little to explain why a perfectly successful establishment had to be closed down so soon. The writers only repeat “for some reason” in their statement.

I infer that the ambiguity harbors a criticism of the Lee government just as the detail that was left out deliberately in the account—unlike in the review of the Langlois Affair—is the fact that the closing of Playground coincided with Lee’s election as the mayor of Seoul in 2002. As a matter of fact, the new city office announced to stop its funding and proposed an old tactic, the

public contest, to replace the KIFV. The rationale, which can be speculated easily by now, is the need to purge the city of the left as a Film2.0 reporter writes of a visit to the Office of Culture.

I visited the Office of Culture at the City Hall cover the story on the closing of Playground. When I handed my business card, the staff asked me a question, quite off the wall. “What would you say is the color of Film2.0?” I asked what he meant by this, and he replied as follows. “I mean, are you conservative or progressive? The people at Playground seem quite consciousness-raising. To compare them to a color, it’d be red.” […] “Sure, we all have the freedom of thought. But the people there, I tell you, are low as low can be.” As the conversation went on, his voice started cracking. (Kim Yŏng, Film2.0, November 2003).

This excerpt shows how deep-seated the Lee government’s erythrophobia (fear of the color red) has been to this day. The conversation with the city hall staff makes it rather clear that, for the city, spending its budget on public media education is tantamount to (its own idea of) socialism. Lee, as the city’s mayor, spent its budget instead on building what would later be called his own achievements such as the famous “restoration” of the Ch’ŏnggye Stream, an ecological blunder in disguise of a nature-friendly popular attraction (see Cho 2010). The position of the Lee’s administration, as such, is decidedly and thoroughly a corporate one.

The campaign writers, therefore, had a solid ground on which they could have made the campaign more explicitly political by engaging directly with the Lee government. This was, however, not the case. They deliberately left the government out of the narrative arguably for two reasons. First, the writers may have learned a lesson from the Langlois Affair that turned quickly into an “anti-cinephilic” movement worldwide (see Keathley 2006:27). The dilemma with dabbling with politics, to put it simply, is that politics become the center of discourse rather than cinema itself. Second, it is also possible that the writers put an effort to maintain political anonymity at least on the surface because an overtly politicized campaign could have deterred

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178 Quoted in Yun, ibid (Mediaus, 2 March 2009).

179 Christian Keathley also writes of how the French cinephilia lost its counter-cultural energy as the Langlois Affair signaled the integration of film culture into cultural policy (Keathley 2006: 26-7).
the younger generation of cinephiles who are political pessimists. As I have noted previously, the consensus among the university students at least seemed to be a strong disillusionment regardless of their experience in political activism.

The cultural significance of the campaign, however, lies in how it ultimately challenged the government to fall on its own sword (of neoliberalism), if only figuratively. As I discuss in the next section, the campaign led cinephiles to speak up on why they need Seoul Art Cinema, one of the raison d’être of which is their rights to choice as audience. The heart of the matter in this fight that I see, in this regard, is that the idea of consumer choice that cinephiles defend is itself no other than the highest principle of the Lee government in theory. When the controversy over beef importation heightened in April 2008, for example, the CEO President is known to have said infamously, “Those who do not want to eat, be my guest.” From real estate to education, in fact, the terms of Lee’s presidential pledges can be summed up as increasing consumer choice while reducing market regulations, thereby encouraging the growth of the private sector (see Kwon 2010). The irony is that so-called choice is no different from a euphemism for coercion in many cases. The cultural significance I see in the talk of the supporters of Seoul Art Cinema is, therefore, that they demand to make the choice themselves. The campaign, in this vein, presents not a clash of ideologies (i.e., radical versus neoliberal) as the government is likely to assert but rather a dialectical criticism of Lee’s own ideals of free market economy. This is one of the ways in which I see local cinephiles as consumers who defend their cosmopolitan tastes and exercise neoliberal common sense at the grassroots level whether diversity is a mere rhetorical device or a real cultural value that every cinephile advocates.
Consuming diversity

Contrary to my expectations, however, not all cinephiles gave the campaign complete support. I have mentioned above, for instance, that Kim-gun suspects those who frequent the cinematheque as prone to developing elitism (*ellit’ū ǔisik*) and bourgeois taste (*burūjuamunhwahyangyu*) without making a real difference in the society. Kim, despite having close friends who are active supporters of the campaign was, in fact, annoyed that some would consider the campaign real activism, more so than he was with the campaign itself. He would, he said, debate about the cinematheque’s crisis and the campaign with his friends of both camps but to no satisfactory conclusion. He himself was no longer sure what was right. He added that diversity in taste (*ch’wiyang ūi tayangsong*) has a long way to go if it is to become a democratic ideal.

While I respect such perspectives, I do see, as I have noted above, a particular cultural significance in the neoliberal sensibilities at the level of the mundane that works, however inadvertently, against the official neoliberalism of the state. The logic of consumer choice, moreover, becomes even stronger as a political rhetoric when it is reinforced in a symbiotic relationship with the ideal of cultural multiplicity. It is, in other words, easier for cinephiles to advocate their cosmopolitan tastes in terms of consumer choice as that which is politically correct and desirable because it carries the value of cultural diversity.

Of the two, I arguably have encountered the voice of consumers more often than that of the cultural advocates although a consumer is often a supporter of diversity at the same time. I rather think I imagine to have read these accounts more often because the love they express of the cinematheque has made quite an impression on me. In their narratives, the movies they watch at the cinematheque are not mere things to be consumed away but to be lived with. A
number of bloggers, in fact, have called the cinemathque their home. Yi Tohun, the former editor in chief of *Pilsa*, is one such person.  

His article begins with a story of how his family lost the house that the family of three generations built from scratch with their own hands to a fraud scheme. His family defended the house even through the financial crisis of the late 1990s. Yi, however, writes that nothing that he has experienced and seen so far equals the fear of losing his refuge, his “house like a painting.” The cinemathque is, for many of its supporters, where they “grow up,” “transform,” and “learn about life.” In other words, it does not need to have them call it a home; it already is their dwelling place. How the cinemathque has become their home of hearts is, of course, watching movies—“Tarkovsky, Godard, Renoir, and Ford”—that they never had the chance to encounter elsewhere whether it be politics or aesthetics in movies that they fell in love with. As consumers, they demand to have such differences as choice at the theater or at least at the cinemathque.

The most visible difference between the consumer and cultural rhetorics used in support of the cinemathque is perhaps that the former often illustrates the personal attachment to the cinemathque whereas the stake in the argument of the latter is more likely to affect beyond the individual cinephile. It was therefore not uncommon for the supporters to compare the cinemathque to historical or public treasures such as the Library at Thebes in Ancient Greece whose inscription over the door read “medicine for the soul” or the South Gate of the early

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182 Ibid.
Chosŏn Period (est. 1396) that burnt down by an arsonist in 2008. At the center of their rhetoric, however, lied invariably the notion of diversity.

Diversity, on the one hand, can be as simple as the difference embodied in the names of the auteurs such as Fellini or Ozu for many of the supporters of the cinemathéque. It seemed, however, that cinephiles are also aware of how easy it is for the seemingly harmless notion of difference to lead to distinction making at the same time. One of the supporters has written as much on the cinemathéque’s blog as follows.

Perhaps some will say that the cinemathéque is old and worn—slumped, in fact. But I find riches in its rags. [...] What I do insist on, if I may, is that the cinemathéque be unlike other independent and art theaters that egg on the consumption of film as a cultural commodity that exists for the sake of “making distinction” (kubyŏl chikki). This is exactly what they suggest, if tacitly, as the precondition for cultural diversity. (Kim Chiyŏng, late 20s)

Kim’s petition is significant because it further specifies another way in which consumer choice and cultural multiplicity coexist in the cinephilic discourse. It is, in other words, believed possible or desirable to have meaningful differences in taste without (classed) distinction making. Despite having made a type of distinction with her education capital on the blog, Kim reminds one of the “intellectual” in Bourdieu’s work who expects from art a symbolic confrontation with social reality unlike the bourgeois who expects “emblems of distinction” in art (Bourdieu 1984: 293). It is, of course, difficult to tell whether all visitors of Seoul Art Cinema are not guilty of making distinction. It would be unfair on my part to imagine a particular group of consumers as indifferent to the classed nature of consumption whereas I have seen distinction making in the consumption of other commodities among young South Koreans. I rather believe, however, that if the youth at the cinemathéque made distinction at all it would most likely be an attitudinal one.

183 http://trafic.tistory.com/entry/시네마테크-지키기-58회-영혼의-갈증을-해소시키는-오아시스;

184 http://trafic.tistory.com/entry/시네마테크-지키기-스물네-번째-메시지
that considers it styleless and pretentious to watch art and classical films just to be different or, even worse, a middle class despite the fact that they would, indeed, be accumulating cultural capital.

I have from the beginning of the chapter made the suggestion that cinephiles share a type of neoliberal sensibility when it comes purely to their habits as consumers. I still believe this to be true to a certain extent because neoliberalism is arguably the single most powerful discourse that plays a hegemonic hand in the everyday affairs of South Koreans. What I consider positive about the grassroots neoliberal discourses such as on consumer choice—all the more so because it is unlikely to be unlearned at the present—is precisely its potential to evolve into rhetoric of cultural equity. I suggest, in this regard, that diversity as doubly signified is one of the crossroads where local spectatorship meets movies in transnational circulation as any other commodities move in transit today for cosmopolitan consumption.

**Conclusion**

It is my wish that the reader received an intimate, though not complete, sense of the culture of young cinephiles in South Korea in this dissertation. The picture that I have endeavored to portray is, to recap, that cinephiles grow in intimate knowledge of and share cosmopolitan tastes in film whether it be the cinematheque, personal online libraries, books, or friends through which they encounter film. The question of postcoloniality, or neoliberalism for that matter, is not to be taken lightly in the postcolonial world as (post)coloniality is itself the condition in which we come across trans-national and cross-cultural exchanges of text and capital. I have maintained, however, that it is possible to see in cultural practices a positive shift
that has been taking place in the global power dynamics through continued interactions between the West and the Rest. This change, I would suggest, is especially significant as it has been seen among the group of people as marginal as a university film club in South Korea—a gathering of economic (as social precariats) and cultural minorities—as changes are, generally speaking, finally made real once it is experienced at the level of the quotidian. If one had a choice between participation in and rejection of the things that circulate in the postcolonial world (e.g., Film Art), therefore, I rather believe that rejection is not the only way to respond to the hegemony. It is only in participation that we might come across ways of overcoming global inequity and keeping communications alive. I recognize that it is a difficult and complicated task to negotiate the terms of power in participating in the postcolonial world as such; however, as I repeat, we might perhaps see the prospect of further changes when we turn our eyes to things as mundane as watching movies.
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