



QUEER  
CINEMA  
in the World

KARL SCHOONOVER  
ROSALIND GALT

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KARL SCHOONOVER  
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— To our loves —

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## INTRODUCTION

### Queer, World, Cinema

Maryam Keshavarz's film *Circumstance* (2011) uses a scene of film consumption to expose the international fault lines of politics and sexuality. The film is set in contemporary Tehran and centers on two young Iranian women, Atafeh and Shireen, who are in love but are compelled to hide their relationship. With their friends Joey and Hossein, the women visit a back-room video store to buy Western movies (figure I.1). They come across Gus Van Sant's *Milk* (2008) and begin to discuss its politics. For Joey and Hossein, *Milk* matters primarily not as a story of gay rights but as a story of political activism and an inspiring example of grassroots organizing for the youth of Iran. Thus, Joey proclaims, "This film is not about fucking. It is about human rights!" to which Atafeh responds, "Fucking is a human right." The question of how to read a film such as *Milk* and what a "gay" film might signify internationally is explicitly played out in this exchange. If fucking is a human right, then queerness takes its place on a certain kind of



**Fig. 1.1:** A video store provides space to discuss human rights in *Circumstance*.

world stage. But is that space of “human rights” the only one in which non-Western queerness can be made palpable in cinema? Or, is it ethnocentric to demand that non-Western queer desire be understood in terms of Western gay identity politics? Is it right, as Joey implies, to appropriate American gay rights struggles for other political causes and in other cultural contexts? These questions that *Circumstance* poses textually have proved equally contentious in the film’s critical and scholarly reception. The film has been both welcomed as a positive account of lesbian desire in Iran and critiqued as an Islamophobic product of an ethnocentric Western logic.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, the film cannot help but provoke the question of queers in the world and of cinema’s role in queer world politics.

*Circumstance* anticipates the challenges involved in representing queerness cross-culturally. The film is perhaps unusually aware of the pitfalls of such translocation, since Keshavarz shot in Lebanon with a fake script to protect her cast and crew from authorities. Cinema as an institution and a practice is not a neutral mediator of lesbian representation for Keshavarz but has a quite material politics that is then encoded into the film itself. But this impetus to thematize cinema textually can be seen in a striking number of contemporary queer films that allude meta-textually to cinema’s institutional spaces. This recurrence of the social apparatus of cinema as a textual motif alerts us to cinema’s unique role in sustaining and making evident queer counterpublics. Video stores, for example, are often posed as sites of cultural intersection, and they figure the messy intermingling of community identity and individual desire across such disparate films as *The Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, dir., 1996), *Fire* (Deepa Mehta, dir., 1996), *Nina’s Heavenly*



**Fig. 1.2:** A scene of communal film consumption in *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*.

*Delights* (Pratibha Parmar, dir., 2006), *J'ai tué ma mère/I Killed My Mother* (Xavier Dolan, dir., 2009), and *Parada/The Parade* (Srđjan Dragojević, dir., 2011). Communal film consumption occupies a privileged space of queer longing in *Ang pagdadalaga ni Maximo Oliveros/The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros* (Auracus Solito, dir., 2005; figure 1.2), *Bu San/Good Bye, Dragon Inn* (Tsai Ming-liang, dir., 2003), *Ni na bian ji dian/What Time Is It There?* (Tsai Ming-liang, dir., 2001), and the short *Last Full Show* (Mark V. Reyes, dir., 2005). The locations in which queer people access cinema have even become the subject of several recent documentaries that have focused on queer film festivals and their audiences, such as *Acting Out: 25 Years of Film and Community in Hamburg* (Cristina Magadlinou, Silvia Torneden, and Ana Grillo, dirs., 2014) and *Queer Activism* (Masa Zia Lenárdic and Anja Wutej, dirs., 2013). Cinema makes queer spaces possible, but at the same time, what cinema means in these films is rarely prescriptive. It is a space that is never quite resolved or decided, at once local and global, public and private, mainstream and underground; it produces spaces of dominance and resistance.

Of course, for the video store as much as the queer film festival, reception often depends on translation.<sup>2</sup> *Circumstance* features a scene of translation in which, later in the narrative, the four friends are employed to dub *Milk* into Farsi (figure 1.3). Watching them record over the original English dialogue, the viewer might be tempted to see the scene as a metaphor for the translatability of sexuality and politics, but the conclusions we are intended to draw are by no means clear. Are these Iranian youths copying American





**Fig. 1.3:** *Circumstance*'s protagonists dub the American film *Milk* into Farsi.

sexual identities and misappropriating a Western politics of coming out? Or are they writing over—more literally, speaking over—that American text, replacing it with an Iranian idiom? Or is the process of translation more ambivalent?<sup>3</sup> Through its dramatization of translation, the film is able to articulate simultaneously not only Iranian versus American cultural politics, but also the women's spoken and unspoken desires and their public and covert identities. The viewer's ability to see the layering of visible identity and hidden meanings simultaneously is enabled by the fact that *Circumstance* itself is a film. The multilayered meanings of this scene are produced by its use of cinematic spaces and forms: the separate production of sound and image in the dubbing scenario creates virtual spaces for the articulation of same-sex desire. The film thus exploits both the theme of transnational cinema and the formal complexities of cinematic narration, and in that exploration it interrogates the stability conventionally granted to distinctions of public and private, straight and queer, Euro-American and Iranian. To understand queerness in the world, then, *Circumstance* tells us that we have to think not just about the representations on-screen but about the cinematic apparatus itself, its mechanisms of articulation, and its modes of transnational circulation.

This book draws critical attention to the place of queer cinema in the world: what might or could the world mean to queers, and what does queer cinema mean for the world? By bringing the reader to the intersection of queer politics and world cinema, it asks both how queer films construct ways of being in the world and what the political value is of the worlds that queer cinema creates. To propose a queer world cinema is to invite trouble.

The combination of terms provokes a series of anxieties about the certainty of knowing and the privilege of position; it raises fears of mistranslation, of neocolonial domination, of homogeneity and the leveling of difference. It suggests the forcing of meaning or the instrumentalization of film aesthetics in support of a limiting identity politics. In researching and presenting this project, we have encountered all of these concerns, often underwritten by a sense among those involved in queer film culture that the terms “world,” “queer,” and “cinema” should not be spoken together by those sensitive to global politics and cultural difference. Despite our agreement with the political and aesthetic stakes of this reluctance, we are placing these terms together in a risky venture. Our willful evocation of queer/world/cinema insists that queer cinema enables different ways of being in the world and, more than this, that it creates different worlds.

Cinema is always involved in world making, and queerness promises to knock off kilter conventional epistemologies. Thinking queerness together with cinema thus has a potential to reconfigure dominant modes of worlding. We use this term “worlding” to describe queer cinema’s ongoing process of constructing worlds, a process that is active, incomplete, and contestatory and that does not presuppose a settled cartography. Any utterance about the world contains a politics of scale that proposes particular parameters for that world, and we insist on de-reifying the taken-for-granted qualities that these parameters often possess. We see film texts as active in this process. Worlding necessarily includes (though is not limited to) the many processes and concepts that have gained traction in thinking about the planet’s cultures: globalization, transnational identification, diaspora, postcolonialism, internationalism, ecology, cosmopolitanism, and so on. We argue that queer cinema elaborates new accounts of the world, offering alternatives to embedded capitalist, national, hetero- and homonormative maps; revising the flows and politics of world cinema; and forging dissident scales of affiliation, affection, affect, and form.<sup>4</sup>

We need all three terms—queer, world, and cinema—to make this argument. There is an emerging literature on globality within queer theory that takes on neoliberal economics, the complicity of “queer” in homonationalism and globalization, and the limitations of Western models of LGBT identity to engage the gendered and sexual life worlds of the global South. This scholarship is important to our project, but it misses what is unique about cinema and its ability to nourish queer spaces that are not reducible to capital, both textually and institutionally. Similarly, a critical awareness of the global frame has challenged and revised the traditional rubrics of

film studies, inflecting national, generic, and industrial studies with categories such as the transnational, diasporic, the exilic, and migrant. However, these studies too often have been partitioned away from the innovations of queer theory, leaving an overly hetero account of the shapes of the cinematic world. Finally, scholarship on queer cinema forms a crucial basis for our analysis, from pathbreaking studies of lesbian and gay representation to criticism of the New Queer Cinema (NQC), queer experimental film, film festivals, and more. We draw widely on this archive, but despite significant studies of national and regional cinema, queer film studies has yet to fully engage the challenges of the global. These three foundational concepts—queer, world, and cinema—provide theoretical pathways into our argument. Each term is contested, and when brought together they prompt us to ask what kinds of global communities are produced (or precluded) by queer film consumption and how presiding visions of the global depend on the inclusion or exclusion of queer lives. In this introduction, we map the stakes, for us, of queer cinema in the world.

### **What's Queer about Cinema?**

Cinema might appear more stable as a concept than either queer or world, but this book is as much a work of film theory as of queer critique, and the meanings of cinema cannot be taken for granted. The queer worlds we explore are made available through cinema's technologies, institutional practices, and aesthetic forms, which together animate spaces, affective registers, temporalities, pleasures, and instabilities unique to the cinematic sensorium. It is crucial to affirm that cinema is not simply a neutral host for LGBT representations but is, rather, a queerly inflected medium. To adapt Jasbir Puar's terminology, we understand cinema as a queer assemblage.<sup>5</sup>

Part of what makes popular cinema popular is the queer pleasures of spectatorship. The ease with which audiences identify and desire across expected lines of gender is what gives classical Hollywood, for example, its seductive and transgressive appeal.<sup>6</sup> We can develop Alexander Doty's account of queer pleasures in classical cinema if we think about how Hollywood's narration of point of view asks all spectators to adopt the perspectives of various and often incommensurate personae within even the same scene. Few audience members are allowed a perfectly reflective or narcissistic relationship to the bodies on-screen. In fact, one of the infamous debates of canonical feminist film theory surrounds Laura Mulvey's use of the word "transvestite" to describe how Hollywood films demand that a female spectator oscillate her identification, often adopting a position in discourse aligned with male

agency and the male gaze.<sup>7</sup> While these debates were sometimes accused of heterocentrism, they nonetheless point to how the basic operation of the Hollywood text requires a certain gender mobility.<sup>8</sup> If these ambidextrous affinities render all spectatorship potentially queer, cinematic traditions have developed variegated ways to play with this capacity. Of course, mainstream cinemas have means of damping down queer identificatory structures via the gaze, especially Hollywood itself (as Mulvey has taught us), but as with feminist film theory's critique of the gendered gaze, the site of ideological struggle is the structure of the image rather than simply its content. We see this tension in the films of Ferzan Özpetek: both *Hamam/Steam: The Turkish Bath* (1997) and *Mine Vaganti/Loose Cannons* (2010) play with the gendered ambiguity of the desiring gaze, shuttling between same-sex and opposite-sex identifications.

The dynamism of the cinematic image pushes against the reification of meaning, as it keeps the signifier in motion, never fixing terms of relationality. Maria San Filippo has argued for "the bisexual space of cinema" as a potentiality, constituted by "textual *sites* (spatio-temporal locations) and spectatorial *sights* (ways of seeing) that indicate how sexuality as well as gender is irreducible to and always already in excess of dominant culture's monosexual, heterocentrist paradigm."<sup>9</sup> Not all films activate bisexual space, but cinema's sensory apparatus constantly alludes to its potential. This dynamic spatiality pushes against normative sexualities and genders but also against the sedimented systems of the globalized world. For instance, the Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine links sexuality, critiques of globalization, and film aesthetics in an interview. When Joseph Massad asks Chahine how he interrelates his aesthetic sense with his political message, Chahine responds that politics are inevitable in cinema. After critiquing the inequalities of the supposed open market of globalization, he notes that what is happening in the world "even influences your sex life; what happens in bed depends upon what is happening in politics."<sup>10</sup> Or, as Benigno Sánchez-Eppeler and Cindy Patton put it, "Sexuality is intimately and immediately felt, but publicly and internationally described and mediated."<sup>11</sup> Politics infuses sex, and cinema is the place where this intertwining of the intimate and the public can be visibly registered. Cinema does not merely offer a convenient institutional space of distribution and exhibition in LGBT film festivals and cosmopolitan art houses. Rather, it produces queer identification, desire, and figurability as a constituent feature of the medium.

It is important to stipulate this queer stratum of the cinematic so that when we consider how to define queer cinema, we are not tempted merely

to instrumentalize identities or representational content. Corraling a category of “queer cinema” is tricky. Some scholars have found it crucial to distinguish an identitarian strand of lesbian and gay cinema from a more radical (or at least anti-identitarian) queer practice.<sup>12</sup> We might define queer films in this way, or with reference to queer directors, or again as those films viewed by queer audiences. But who is excluded when these logics are imposed as the prerequisite for defining queer cinema? Each of these common-sense approaches is undone by its insistent privileging of Western or other dominant practices of cinema. Thus, filmmakers outside the West may not be “out” as gay and, indeed, may not find the rhetoric of visibility useful or relevant for their sense of self. Similarly, any presumption of what a queer audience might look like is often underwritten by insidious cultural assumptions. Madhava Prasad writes that whereas reception studies see Western spectators as complex and autonomous in their interpretations of texts, ethnographic studies understand non-Western spectators as reading only and exactly what the text directly presents.<sup>13</sup> This is equally a problem for queer world cinema, which is too rarely granted complexity in its reception contexts.

Sometimes films are queer in certain contexts and not in others. Perhaps because of our interest in these questions of knowledge (How do we know queer cinema when we see it? Will we always recognize queer films as queer?), we are alert to those moments in which foreign films are claimed as queer or imagined as not queer. Many of the films canonized as contemporary world cinema engage with queer issues or feature queer characters, but they are infrequently analyzed by queer film studies or recognized by their straight advocates as queer endeavors. For example, within Thailand Apichatpong Weerasethakul is regarded as gay, and his artistic practice is understood as queer. However, he has been embraced in the West by mainstream critics and proponents of art cinema as an international auteur.<sup>14</sup> His films are more likely to be screened in world cinema venues (Cannes, Venice, Berlin, New York’s Museum of Modern Art) than in LGBT film festivals. Similarly, some critics have accused the Taiwanese director Tsai Ming-liang of overusing sexually ambiguous characters as a way to cater to foreign audiences, whereas recent scholarship has engaged with the complexity of his affiliations to queerness, sexual acts, and film style.<sup>15</sup> As Fran Martin puts it, “His films’ obsessive and ultimately denaturalizing focus on sexual behaviours rather than sexual identities does seem to preclude a reading of his cinema as straightforwardly ‘gay’ in the sense of sexual identity politics.”<sup>16</sup> So while it is clear that the remit of queer film must be expanded, how to

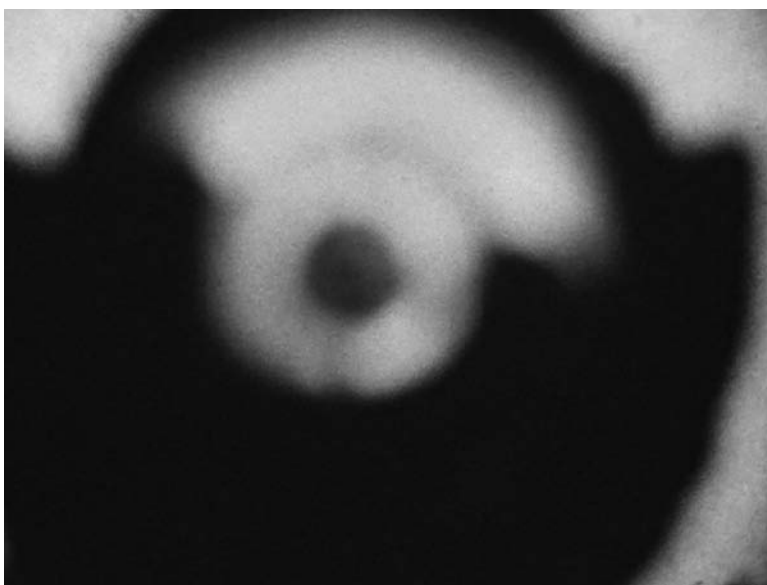


**Fig. 1.4:** Same-sex intimacy is visible in classic Hindi films such as *Razia Sultan*.

do this is fraught with epistemological instabilities that are as geopolitical as they are sociological.

From its start, queer film studies has included those seemingly straight films that LGBT audiences have made indelibly queer. In fact, one well-known anthology—*Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*—is largely concerned with reception issues.<sup>17</sup> For scholars of Indian cinema such as Rajinder Dudrah and Gayatri Gopinath, popular Hindi films often flaunt homosocial bonds in ways that invite re-coding by audiences looking for same-sex intimacies on-screen (e.g., *Sholay* [Ramesh Sippy, dir., 1975], *Pakeezah* [Kamal Amrohi, dir., 1972]).<sup>18</sup> The only slightly submerged networks of forbidden desire in films such as *Mughal-e-Azam* (K. Asif, dir., 1960) and *Razia Sultan* (Kamal Amrohi, dir., 1983; figure 1.4) become the means by which queer audiences have adopted mainstream cinema as their own. Stanley Kwan similarly mines the history of popular Chinese cinema for queer subtexts and pleasures in his documentary *Yang ± Yin: Gender in Chinese Cinema* (1996). More recently, in *Pop!* (2012), the Iranian artist Navid Sinaki deploys found footage from prerevolutionary popular Persian cinema to reveal a persistence of alternate desires in Iranian culture. This re-coding of “straight” films as queer is not simply a private practice with a discrete semiotics: queer appropriation contaminates a wider cultural perception of popular cinema. Queer film criticism has always had to address the question of how to define the boundaries of queerness across a perplexing multitude of texts and audiences.

Yet another approach to queer film methodology is a textual focus that defines queer films as those that depict queer people diegetically. Although



**Fig. 1.5:** In *Kajitu*, shooting through a glass apple produces strikingly graphic abstract images.

we will be closely concerned with all manner of queer figures and representations, a definition that demands representations of queers excludes artists who work in other registers and forecloses on the queerly expressive potential of cinematic sounds and images. For instance, an experimental film such as *Kajitu/Some Days Ago* (Nakamura Takehiro, 2008) is largely abstract in its images, but by shooting through a glass ball it enables the spectator to see the queer potential of the lens to transfigure nature by warping normative regimes of visibility (figure 1.5). Film scholars are alive to the queer potential of abstraction. Juan Suárez, for example, persuasively writes on queer textures, grain, and glitter in the American underground films of Jack Smith, as well as the political radicality of color-saturated tropicalist style in the work of the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica.<sup>19</sup> In a different vein, Song Hwee Lim analyzes Tsai Ming-liang's "undoing of anthropomorphic realism, which partly explains why his representations (of queer sexuality, for example) are not always amenable to identity politics." For Lim, Tsai's characteristic art-cinematic quality of temporal drift sustains a queer representational logic found as much in the relationship of stillness to movement as it is in gay characters.<sup>20</sup> These examples illustrate the significance of queer abstraction in histories of art cinema and the avant-garde, but they also insist on the

limits of a politics of representation and on queer cinema's participation in what Rey Chow terms "the radical implications of cinema's interruption of the human as such."<sup>21</sup>

A final possibility for definition lies in thinking queer cinema in terms of its staging of sexuality, gendered embodiment, and nonheteronormative sex. Teresa de Lauretis's memorable attempt to define queer textuality insists that queerness inheres in a formal disruption of referentiality at the level of the signifier and, further, that "a queer text carries the inscription of sexuality as something more than sex."<sup>22</sup> De Lauretis is attempting to balance a semiotic account of queerness's anti-normative potential that would focus on its decentering of dominant regimes of representation with an anxiety that such abstraction might lose sight of a crucial link to dissident sexuality. Her "something more" speaks to feminist theory's account of cinema as an apparatus of desire, endlessly reconstituting what Jacqueline Rose called sexuality in the field of vision. Cinematic images of desiring bodies cannot be thought without attention to this apparatus. Queer film theory is always a feminist project for us, and this book maintains a deep investment in cinema as a principal technology of gender and sexuality. De Lauretis's use of the word "sex" here speaks at once of sex acts and of a resistance to the binary of sexual difference; hence, it may include queer genders, such as genderqueer and trans experience. Limiting our focus to sex acts as a necessary quality of textual queerness, de Lauretis allows us to address a crucial tension that is revealed when we propose sex as a determining facet of queer cinema.

On the one hand, representation of same-sex or other dissident sex acts is for many spectators a defining pleasure of queer cinema. The gay Filipino melodrama *Walang Kawala/No Way Out* (Joel Lamangan, dir., 2008), for instance, quite self-consciously interrupts its narrative for a slow-motion montage in flashback of its central couple having sex. That sex sells is not exactly news, but the organization of cinema's sexual pleasures can help us understand the affective force of queer film cultures. Deborah Shaw has pointed out that sometimes we go to movies because we really want to see two girls kissing, and this deceptively simple idea discloses the potential of the erotic to remake the cinematic desire machine.<sup>23</sup> A film such as *The Hunger* (Tony Scott, dir., 1983) may not seem queer in the way de Lauretis intends, but its iconic sex scene circulates in the lesbian cultural imaginary in ways that go beyond the limits of the film's narrative. Its queer fandom is well documented.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Campbell X's *Stud Life* (2012) includes scenes of lesbian sex that challenge cinematic conventions of gender expression and embodiment. In their eroticized depiction of the top and bottom





**Fig. 1.6:** *Stud Life*'s sex scenes illustrate the cinematic potential of showing sex.

dynamic and BDSM power exchange, these scenes assert the political necessity of queer monstration. Here, the political aim of extending representation beyond mainstream fantasies about white femme lesbians is achieved in and through sex acts: cinema's ability to *show* sex tethers the voyeuristic pleasures of erotic spectacle to the counterpublic logic of visibility. The titular stud is butch, black, kinky, and located not in a bourgeois fantasy space but in working-class London. As in the same director's erotic short *Fem* (2007), *Stud Life*'s camera appears most confident and comfortable when it displays the femme body and embodies the butch gaze. Both films succeed in their most sexually explicit sequences because they make the viewer re-see the black lesbian body (figure 1.6).

On the other hand, the demand that queer films depict sex acts also risks endorsing a Western cultural privileging of visibility and publicness. This impetus can be linked to neocolonial representational impulses that imperiously call for the exposure of the ethnic other as a queer body open to colonization by the West. Non-Western or nontraditional sexualities may not always fare well when viewed through a Western lens of visibility. Queer film scholarship has always been attentive to practices of not showing, from Patricia White's writing on invisibility to Catherine Grant's reading of the Argentine director Lucrecia Martel's *La mujer sin cabeza*/*The Headless Woman* (2008), which reveals the film's queerness not in any overt visioning of sex but, instead, in its framing and looking relations.<sup>25</sup> Ann Cvetkovich outlines the geopolitics



**Fig. 1.7:** *Girlfriend, Boyfriend* couples queer intimacy to political rebellion.

of this issue, stating that “it has been extremely important for queer studies to move across historical and geographic boundaries, away from the recent history of gay and lesbian identities and communities in the Western metropolis. In such contexts, what counts as (homo)sexuality is unpredictable and requires new vocabularies; affect may be present when overt forms of sexuality are not.”<sup>26</sup> As an attempt to refute a Western optical regime, Cvetkovich’s shift to affect proves crucial when framing queer cinema globally.

To illustrate this point, consider the Taiwanese historical drama *Girlfriend, Boyfriend* (Yang Ya-che, dir., 2012), in which gay desires between two school friends are registered insistently but not explicitly alongside a political narrative of student protest. The film is set in 1985, when Taiwan is under martial law, and the draconian discipline of the school allegorizes the country’s repressive polity. Rebellious Aaron has had his head shaved as punishment for speaking out, locating bodily shame as a locus of political control. In one scene, Aaron and his friend Liam sit together intimately, touching arms, while kids dance with sparklers behind them. Aaron says, “One person dancing alone is a rebellion, but if the whole school dances together, that’s the will of the people.” He draws a fake tattoo on Liam’s arm, writing, “We are waves welling up from the same ocean.” Queer intimacies are here linked to rebellious Taiwanese nationalism, and both a political sense of solidarity and a queer desire are written—literally—on the body. The moment is replete with affect, but its desire will not turn into visible sex. Instead, queer revolutionary hope and the nostalgic evocation of teenage desires flow into a radical narrative of Taiwanese history, replete with the potential and losses of the democracy movement (figure 1.7).

*Girlfriend, Boyfriend* exemplifies a queer affective structure in which cinema theorizes a relationship between spectator and screen, between the individual and the collective, or, in other words, between subjectivity and historical change. Queer cinematic affect can emerge in the political *jouissance* of capturing how non-normative sex feels, but it can equally harness the life worlds of queer feelings whose relationship to the body and its acts travel along other pathways. There is thus a structuring tension in thinking queer world cinema between a reticence to reify certain regimes of sexual representation and the counter impulse to value cinema's monstrative potential to show queer sex. If this tension is to be productive, we may need to expand de Lauretis's terms and think of sexuality in queer cinema as potentially more than, less than, or sometimes exactly coterminous with sex.

If queer cinema cannot depend on queer characters, directors, representations, or audiences, how can it be specified? We return to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's universalizing and minoritizing discourses to think through the trouble with defining queer cinema.<sup>27</sup> A universalizing discourse takes as axiomatic that it is helpful to think universally; that understanding the systems, structures, and discourses of "queer cinema" is a necessary first step for any critical analysis. In this reading, just as it would be restrictive to view world cinema as simply the accretion of films from different countries, with no regard for circuits and systems of power, it is similarly limiting to think queer cinema as merely a collection of queer-oriented texts. This is precisely the trap set by the questions of category outlined earlier. However, a minoritizing discourse reminds us of the need for specificity. Too often, universalizing concepts reiterate dominant power structures, whether of gay male culture, mainstream taste categories, or neo-imperialism. Minoritizing discourse insists on both the cultural heterogeneity and the radical impulses of LGBT cultures, redirecting research away from what is already familiar. Just as Sedgwick refuses to choose between these modes of thought, we resist taxonomizing logics that are always at once too broad and too narrow.

In place of a neat definition of queer cinema, we propose a radically promiscuous approach, and we insist that our polemic can be found in the logic of a capacious corpus. We are unwilling to relinquish the category of queer to charges that openness equals conceptual looseness and a dissipation of power. In fact, we believe that capaciousness is necessary so as not to determine in advance what kinds of films, modes of production, and reception might qualify as queer or do queer work in the world. Thus, this book analyzes unpredictable intersections of queer plus cinema plus world, jostling

side by side feminist videos, trashy heist movies, modernist art films, and homophobic melodramas. We maintain a radical openness on the question of what queer films might look like and where we might find them. Such an openness makes several related political claims:

- It understands the force of queerness as active across the field of cinema, so it refuses to draw bright lines between LGBT films and queer films or between positive and negative representations of queer living, or to stipulate particular modes of identification for filmmakers.
- It contains a theory of what constitutes the cinematic: we acknowledge how diffuse the cinematic has become but insist on its generative potential across platforms, viewing protocols, and institutional contexts. We do not limit queer cinema to traditional theatrical settings or to commercial production.
- It demands that we locate queerness not only in formally transgressive films (which privilege certain culturally dominant canons of world cinema) but equally in popular, debased, and generic forms.
- Conversely, it leaves open the possibility that experimental and non-representational image practices speak in politically coherent ways and offer socially relevant insight to the lives of queer people.
- It draws on queer theory but does not limit queer cinema to those filmmakers with access to or investment in Western theories of sexuality and gender.
- It takes part in an anti-imperialist stance that de-privileges the Western queer film canon and works to upend Eurocentric ways of thinking cinema.
- It resists hierarchies of production value, taking seriously cheaply made films and the political economy of perpetually minoritized audiences. Many of the films we discuss escape the conventional tripartite divisions of First, Second, and Third Cinemas and thus offer important correctives to the constitution of contemporary world cinema.
- It approaches the cinema image as meaning in motion and thus recognizes an inherent semantic instability in even the most overt representations of sex.

In constructing our corpus, then, we asked an apparently simple question: where in the world is queer cinema? We find the locations of queer cinema to be particularly fruitful sites of negotiation: since there is little infrastructure devoted exclusively to the exhibition of queer film or media, a provisional inventory of the spaces—whether bricks and mortar or imagined communities—in

which queer cinema happens can help elucidate the existence of queer cinema in the world. Queer cinema is conventionally found at the film festival or in art-house theaters, but it is also to be found in mainstream theaters and in local language-based markets. Its history includes the community center, the porn theater, and the lesbian potluck. Queer cinema is certainly to be found in the video store, which Lucas Hilderbrand has argued forms both an archive and an affective community, constituted in the degradations of tapes paused and rewound hundreds of times.<sup>28</sup> It is found in bootlegging and tape-sharing communities; on bit torrent sites; in pirated video CDs in China; in underground DVD markets in Iran and Egypt; among gray-market distributors; in queer movie clubs in Croatia organized on Facebook; and at market stalls in Nigeria, Mexico, and Vietnam. It is found through specialist distributors such as Peccadillo and TLA Video; and in video-on-demand (VOD) sites targeted to queer and diasporic audiences. Finally, queer cinema flourishes on social media, on video-sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo.

The online economy of queer cinema is heterogeneous. YouTube hosts serious transnational web series such as *The Pearl of Africa* (Johnny von Wallström, dir., 2014), a Swedish documentary about the Ugandan trans activist Cleopatra Kombugu, but it is, of course, also the home of fan-made supercuts of same-sex kisses in Thai movies and off-air recordings of older gay movies such as Lino Brocka's *Macho Dancer* (1988). Many of the popular South Asian and Southeast Asian films we analyze are more easily accessed on YouTube or through file-sharing sites than on DVD. The social media film distribution company Distrify illustrates how the industry is catching up with online circulation, but it also provides telling insights into how queer cinema is moving in the world. Embedded in Facebook or on LGBT websites, Distrify enables international audiences to share links, view trailers, stream entire films, and access local cinema listings. Films can be rented in 150 countries, paid for in twenty-three currencies, and viewed in eight languages. The company tracks clicks as a way to broker distribution deals and cites the views of Nigerian films by Nigerian diasporic audiences as an example of a demographic it learned about through this kind of analysis.<sup>29</sup> Even as the first wave of queer VOD, such as Busk, disappears, new models of international mobility are emerging.

By broadening the field of inquiry in this way, we aim to respond to the call of many film scholars, who ask, as Ramon Lobato puts it, "Where is contemporary cinema located, and how is it accessed?"<sup>30</sup> Lobato himself begins to answer that question by arguing that "formal theatrical exhibition is no

longer the epicenter of cinema culture.”<sup>31</sup> Instead, he argues for our attention to be turned to the unregulated, ungoverned, and largely unstudied means by which films travel to and among viewers. Lobato contends that studying world cinema requires focusing on “informal distribution,” which includes pirating, covert file sharing, bootlegging, gray-market trading, and so on. When these practices are seen together as an informal economy of film consumption, they constitute neither a niche nor a marginal market. Instead, the informal economy is “the key driver of distribution on a global scale” and must be central to the study of cinema.<sup>32</sup> If, as Lobato argues, “informal circulation has not shown up in our data sets and research frameworks because they have been calibrated in a way that renders these movements invisible,” then we might say that the industrial film historian has been doubly blinded to queer cinema (and its audiences). This is the case, first, because queer cinema has been long excised from official records and public exhibition (due to the application of obscenity standards and other institutions of homophobia), and second, because it has been largely consumed informally via secret networks, delivered in plain envelopes and shared through bootlegging networks.<sup>33</sup>

It is helpful, then, to consider alongside queer cinema’s many material and virtual spaces the equally revealing list of some of the places where queer cinema is not. Despite the proliferation of screens (on trains, in hospital rooms, on the street) characteristic of the contemporary media landscape, we rarely see queer images in these public spaces. In many locations, state censorship means that cinemas, public libraries, and online services are allowed no LGBT content. Queer films may be sequestered in video stores and DVD stalls, available only to those who ask the right questions. They may be categorized with porn in online rental sites, hidden behind paywalls or age restrictions. Google’s auto-fill feature blacklists many gay-oriented search terms, making queer searching incrementally more difficult. Some cell phone companies block LGBT sites, locking down the queer portions of the web. Areas that are underserved by digital projection or without high-speed Internet connections may lack access even to popularly circulating gay movies.

Although the Internet has expanded the media texts available to many people, including those living in repressive regimes, we have been careful to recognize how a Western middle-class sense of availability can shape the terms of access. Even Lobato cautions against privileging “internet users and patterns of activity most commonly found in the USA and other first world nations.”<sup>34</sup> Daniel Herbert writes, “If we take it that ‘film’ is a particular technology for the capture and presentation of moving images, and that ‘cinema’

more broadly describes the social arrangements through which moving images are produced, circulated, and consumed, then over the last several decades, cinema has not ‘died’ but rather proliferated and transformed.”<sup>35</sup> Queer cinema by necessity has been at the forefront of this transformation, but it is also imperiled by institutionalized and often state-sanctioned homophobia. For instance, the paucity of committed queer film archives and university collections renders the preservation and circulation of queer cinema precarious. The explosion of political spaces online must be weighed against the seemingly boundless encroachment of surveillance and against the covert degradation of the public sphere in its migration to corporatized social media platforms.

Queerness is thus complexly embedded in the spaces of world cinema, and, we propose, it plays an intrinsic part in its development. We primarily focus on contemporary queer cinema, from the 1990s onward, a choice that enables us to consider closely the historical situation of globalization and the forms of worldliness that have emerged in this period. Yet we want to complicate a notion of queer cinema that considers only its most recent manifestations, with Barbara Mennel contextualizing the current “explosion” of queer cinema historically.<sup>36</sup> There is a danger in supposing that queer cinema goes global only in the contemporary era, leaving the rest of the world presumptively heterosexual until the effects of Western-style globalization enable a queer cultural discourse. By contrast, our account of cinema as an inherently queer medium asks readers to think about film history as always already queer. We turn to key international queer filmmakers, theorists, and texts from earlier eras to demonstrate how much contemporary world cinema builds on the queer histories embedded in the medium. Even the most conventional histories of cinema are replete with queers, from F. W. Murnau and Rainer Werner Fassbinder to Dorothy Arzner and Lucrecia Martel. Thus, we consider Sergei Eisenstein, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Toshio Matsumoto to be important interlocutors from the Soviet Union, Italy, and Japan, respectively, as are groundbreaking queer-themed films such as *Ba wang bie ji/Farewell My Concubine* (Chen Kaige, dir., 1993) from China and *La Cruel Martina/The Cruel Martina* (Juan Miranda, dir., 1989) from Bolivia.

So in the same way that Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* asks readers to reorient their understanding of the world without reference to Europe as a center, we reframe world cinema both without privileging Europe and without a presumption of heterosexuality as a determinant of the cinematic experience.<sup>37</sup> *Queer Cinema in the World* argues that cinema has always been queer and thus that the worlds made by cinema have al-



ways been queer worlds. What would film history look like if we oriented ourselves to films such as *Fukujusô/Pheasant Eyes* (Jirô Kawate, dir., 1935), a Japanese silent film about same-sex desire between two sisters-in-law? Romit Dasgupta points out the way in which this film prefigures Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, locating lesbian desire in a domestic setting and turning to familial intimacies as a place where women might find fulfillment beyond the strictures of marriage.<sup>38</sup> The film was based on a story written by Nobuko Yoshiya, who lived with her female partner, and yet even recently her family did not agree to reprint her work in a lesbian collection. Both textually and extratextually, *Pheasant Eyes* creates queer spaces, but the heteronormatizing institutions of family and film historiography constantly threaten its visibility. Across both time and space, queer narratives can create contiguities and affinities; it requires renewed attention to see the shapes of this queer cinematic world.

Returning to the present, we argue that queer cinema makes new forms of worldliness visible, thinkable, and malleable. The spectacular growth of queer filmmaking and queer film consumption around the world in the mid-1990s occurred in parallel with the supposed death of cinema. Far from being exhausted, cinema has emerged as a privileged platform for articulating queer experiences of and responses to globalization. An evocative example of queer cinema's symbolic labor in the world can be found among the activities LGBT activists in Indonesia created to observe the International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO) in 2008. Alongside public discussion, street actions, and a radio appearance, the group People like Us—Satu Hati (PLUSH) took an ambulant medical clinic to Pantai Sundak, a village on the south coast of Java. As the Indonesian LGBT network reported, "The group went there together with a medical clinic team while distributing rice, milk powder, second-hand clothes and school supplies. They staged a playback show and even screened the film *Iron Ladies* as an educational tool. The villagers were delighted and became sensitized of LGBT issues along the way."<sup>39</sup> *Satree lek/The Iron Ladies* (Yongyoot Thongkongtoon, dir., 2000) will be discussed in chapter 4, but what stands out for us here is both the use of a *Thai* popular trans sports movie in *Indonesia* as part of a *globalized* anti-homophobia campaign, and the apparently disjunctive combination of cinema with urgent medical needs in a location that is ill served by the state. Of course, as we have seen, such global transits are not always positive: the worldliness of cinematic space is highly contested and frequently instrumentalized for reactionary politics—but never with any completeness. So although we maintain some cynicism toward world cinema as a category, we are reluctant to dismiss it as a neoliberal frenemy.



What is so curious about queer global film culture is the persistence of the *idea* of cinema as an effective means of worlding and of participating in the world politically. In an era in which many take instant digital interconnectivity for granted, why is this old medium still understood as a key means of worlding, of connecting to global politics, and of experiencing the category of the human? Why do queers still go to movies? Cinema persists in queer culture as a site of political ferment, a volatile public stage on which protest can be expressed and ideas disseminated. It also provides spaces in which to nourish more diffuse experiences of affinity, belonging, and intimacy, where spectatorship provokes the formation of unexpected collisions and coalitions. We might consider *Hei yan quan/I Don't Want to Sleep Alone* (Tsai Ming-liang, dir., 2006), where intersecting narratives of bisexual longing and belonging fend off the otherwise precarious realities of globalization, immigrant labor, and transnational identities in contemporary Malaysia. It is the queerness of these connections that makes the terms of intimacy and the exigencies of world politics speak to one other. Or we could point to a popular film such as *Memento Mori* (Kim Tae-yong and Min Kyu-dong, dirs., 1999), which transforms the key generic elements of the globally popular East Asian horror film (longing, dystopic melancholy, surreal but extreme violence) into lesbian drama, making the genre suddenly seem inseparable from same-sex desire. The vitality of these conversations demonstrates that cinema remains a necessary instrument for seeing the world differently and also for articulating different worlds.

### In the World

Inherent in our project is a complex and delicate mapping of what queerness signifies—for cinema and for international public cultures more broadly. The term has been sometimes embraced but equally often contested by activists around the world. For instance, Robert Kulpa, Joanna Mizielińska, and Agata Stasińska have argued that Western-style queer theory has a neo-imperialist quality that limits understandings of radical practice in Poland. Still, they end by insisting, “We are queer. Locally.”<sup>40</sup> Tracing this conflicted relationship to “queer” in every community in the world is impossible, but we are closely attentive to the ways in which the term resonates, or is adapted, transformed, or repudiated altogether, in different localities and cultural contexts. It is widely used in untranslated English form—for instance in Queer Lisboa, the Lisbon film festival, and in Hong Kong, where the popular website Queer Sisters advocates for lesbians. We can hear it in local vernaculars, too: in Turkey, “queer” becomes *kuir*, and in mainland China,

it is transliterated into *ku'er* (酷儿). In Taiwan and Hong Kong, a more common translation of queer is 酷異, meaning cool and different.<sup>41</sup> Each of these apparently simple translations conceals a complex labor of appropriation, adaptation, and transformation.

To return to Eastern Europe, we can see two politically different approaches in art and activist culture. Zvonimir Dobrovic, former head of the Queer Zagreb film festival sees queer as directly translatable, arguing that the festival “made queer an accepted term in Croatia.”<sup>42</sup> By contrast, the organizers of the Queer Beograd Festival both use and transform the term, turning the English “queer” into the Serbian *kvar*:

In Serbian there is no word that means queer, no way to say what we mean about queer being more than LGBT equality. For us queer means radical, inclusive, connecting to all kinds of politics and being creative about how we live in this world. So our new festival is called “Kvar,” a technical term literally translating to mean “a malfunction in a machine,” because in this world of capitalism, nationalism, racism, militarism, sexism and homophobia, we want to celebrate ourselves as a malfunction in this machine.<sup>43</sup>

At stake for each is a politics of the national that implicitly theorizes the relationship of the nation to the world. Dobrovic’s sense of Croatia joining a pre-existing and progressive world of queers (via the film festival) is complicated by the Belgrade collective’s writing of local, post-Yugoslav, antinationalist, and antiglobalization politics into the project of queer destabilization. The vernaculars of the word “queer” thus recursively stage precisely the issues we see as animating our project: the word speaks to the radical potential and internationalist impulses, as well as to the geopolitical hierarchies and imperialist forces, bound up in world cinema’s spaces.

A central goal of *Queer Cinema in the World* is simultaneously to take care when deploying the word “queer” politically and not to dodge the more promiscuous applications of that label. We stand with those activists and theorists who resist efforts to impose Western models of gender and sexual life on communities and people who define themselves otherwise. At the same time, we have reservations about seemingly anti-imperialist approaches that can foreclose on queer discursive space and thus inadvertently deem the whole world always already straight.<sup>44</sup> It is crucial to maintain both modes of critique, as the world is always in the process of being made. Over-specifying what counts as queer can place an unfair burden on those living in non-heterosexual and gender-dissident formations, and our use of

the term is self-consciously open-ended. Puar posits queerness as a potential counterforce to the liberal discourses of the global, insisting that “queerness irreverently challenges a linear mode of conduction and transmission: there is no exact recipe for a queer endeavor, no a priori system that taxonomizes the linkages, disruptions, and contradictions into a tidy vessel.”<sup>45</sup> Our use of queer as a conceptual rubric is thus intended as a way into a volatile discursive field rather than as an a priori claim. To ask whether globalization enables the queer to emerge as a universal figure or whether queer films can be found in every national cinema is, we consider, a flawed approach that begs a series of questions about sexuality, gender, and the spaces of the world.

At the start of the article “In Search of Sensibilities: The International Face of Gays on Film,” published in the gay magazine *Manifest* in 1983, Penni Kimmel describes an occupational hazard of being a film critic: “Film reviewers are notoriously greedy. Gay film reviewers . . . can get positively grabby.”<sup>46</sup> Across the article, Kimmel looks for what she sees as “a definite gay sensibility” in many of the films shown at that year’s San Francisco International Film Festival, but she does so while mocking her own impulses as a Western critic trying to establish that queer film is in the world. “Was there enough gay sensibility to be found in the celluloid of Upper Volta?” she writes. “Would lesbian love float across the [Iron] Curtain or over the [Berlin] Wall?”<sup>47</sup> What does count as gay for Kimmel is surprisingly heterogeneous: a documentary on Montgomery Clift, a film about child abuse, a docudrama on sexually transmitted diseases that features naked men. She is also attuned to how the spaces created by the film festival’s events amend and extend the political life of these films and the project of world cinema. For example, Harry Belafonte’s autobiographical film triggered a discussion of the “persecution of gays in Cuba” to which the neither Cuban nor queer (though Caribbean and gay-allied) Belafonte replied, “All art is political. People are responsible for each other; we must protect the rights of all human beings. . . . The question is how do you politically use the art?” In that context, Kimmel notes distinctions between engaged films that enable a queer reading and more directly political films that banish “homophilia” as if homosexuality were merely “a sophisticated peacetime luxury.” This snapshot of a Western critic’s “world cruise for films to jolt the rods and the cones and the grey matter and still leave me feeling wonderful with the world” suggests how the search for queer films has often been a means of mapping the world.

We might connect Kimmel’s grabbiness to an imperialist or neocolonial project, one that appropriates difference as yet another facet of its own

methodological self-awareness. A contemporary version of this might be the encyclopedic volume *L'homosexualité au cinéma* by Didier Roth-Bettoni, which attempts to “englobe” a hitherto uncollected global history of more than five thousand LGBT films from all continents. This ambitious project nonetheless falls into some neocolonial traps when speaking of the naiveté of African films or the “obvious” taboo of homosexuality in the Arab world.<sup>48</sup> However, we could equally see Kimmel’s discussion as presaging more politically engaged readings of world cinema. For instance, Gopinath’s “scavenger” approach emulates a diasporic spectator who crosses geopolitical and historical boundaries in reading non-normative desires on-screen. Gopinath’s technique itself builds on another version of queer appropriation—that of Patricia White’s “retrospectatorship”—which reminds us that appropriation has been a necessary practice for queers that reaches not only to other parts of the world but also across time.<sup>49</sup>

A cliché retold about the 1990s model of queer cultural studies is that as a hermeneutic, it overly appropriated texts, objects, attitudes, and historical figures to queer. It was too grabby. These seemingly overeager appropriative acts defined the verb “to queer.” Today in the humanities, a backlash has taken hold, and promiscuous queering can sometimes be seen as old-fashioned and misguided. Indeed, the backlash has succeeded in suggesting that all queer critical practices are inflected with a looseness of definition and critical object. In fact, these queer perspectives are now often marginalized by an undue burden of proof, which seems indirectly to reinforce the always already heterosexual imperatives of dominant descriptions of world history. Heterosexual patriarchy is a world system that naturalizes its own dominance and far-reaching proliferation as a theory of human life.<sup>50</sup> When we look back to the 1990s, the appropriation of the word “nation” by “queer nation” was not a nationalist or homonationalist endeavor. It was an aggressive re-coding strategy based on the sheer impossibility of imagining a world in which queerness could be a culturally productive force. As Sarah Schulman reminds us, it brought together an otherwise impossible pairing of words.<sup>51</sup>

In writing this book, we have resisted thinking that heterogeneity—or bringing together impossible terms—is a problem. We are not ready to give up on the possibility of reimagining a world that would be useful to more than just a tiny percentage of its inhabitants. We believe that non-Western cinemas of sexual and gender dissidence may be one place from which that world can be reimagined. Borrowing from Ernst Bloch, we replace the homogenous vision of the “crackless world picture” with the “never closed” utopian impulse that “breaks into life when the varnish cracks.”<sup>52</sup> We remain

politically committed to resisting the lure of totalities while refusing to reduce queer cultural practices to minoritized particularity.

One of the challenges of writing the book has been balancing the grabby tendency of the (usually) Western critic while not giving up on the world. On the one hand, non-Western filmmakers offer revised definitions of the world, distinctly different from either those of world cinema studies or those of commodity capitalism in the global North. But on the other hand, non-Western texts can warn of the dangers of grabbiness—and that critique needs also to be showcased. In commodity globalism, a plethora of choices is a simulacrum of difference, in which everything carries the same exchangeable value. Insofar as cinema is intertwined in the systems of global capital, it always risks such reification. Rey Chow describes contemporary culture as “caught up in . . . global visibility—the ongoing, late-capitalist phenomenon of mediatised spectacularization, in which the endeavor to seek social recognition amounts to an incessant production and consumption of oneself and one’s group as images on display.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Sean Cubitt takes up a critical position on dominant modes of cinematic worlding when he argues that “cosmopolitanism corresponds to informationalization because it operates in only one direction. The cosmopolitan is at home in the culture of the other, but he does not offer the other the hospitality of his own home.”<sup>54</sup> We will see this compulsive visualization of the other at work when we consider the conflicted cinematic discourses of queer multiculturalism in chapter 1.

We insist, however, that this is not the only possible vision of the world and that cinema has long been embedded in—yet in tension with—the systems of global capital. Some recent accounts of cosmopolitanism offer valuable insight for theorizing queer cinema, even as they speak in quite a different register. In his influential book on the concept, Kwame Anthony Appiah writes,

There are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences.<sup>55</sup>

This passage is, to us, strongly reminiscent of Sedgwick’s foundational axiom that “people are different from one another,” a way of thinking queerness

and the human to which we return in chapter 1. This textual affiliation (albeit probably an unintentional iteration) opens up what processes of worlding can offer us against their more elitist, globalizing manifestations. Pheng Cheah rejects what he calls a “facile cosmopolitanism,” which he aligns with market capitalism, and against which he proposes a “more rigorous . . . modality of cosmopolitanism, that is responsible and responsive to the need to remake the world as a hospitable space, that is, a place that is *open* to the emergence of peoples that globalization deprives of world.”<sup>56</sup> Although we do not adhere closely to the discourse of the cosmopolitan, it is this attempt to remake the world as a place open to those currently deprived of world that motivates this project.

When we analyze queer films in terms of their worldliness, then, we aim to describe what it is that texts create as they intervene in worlding processes. Dudley Andrew writes, “In cinema, something as technical as ‘point of view’ asserts an ideological and political claim, literally orienting a culture to a surrounding world.”<sup>57</sup> For Andrew, every film brings into being a perspective on the world, a way of looking that frames social and affective space. His understanding of point of view here is formal but never merely technical: it tells us something important about the film’s world, but that thing is not quantifiable in the way that global capital wants to capture all human activity. We cannot, for example, measure the colonial gaze in *La Noire de . . . / Black Girl* (Ousmane Sembene, dir., 1966). Rather, point of view for Andrew provokes thought and calls for analysis. In a similar vein, we argue that every film constructs a world formally and that this worldliness has the capacity to recalibrate its own parameters. Worldliness can shift the terms of agency and power and has the ability to create effects in the world.

*Queer Cinema in the World* investigates how queer films intersect with shifting ideas of global politics and world cinema aesthetics in order to open out queer cinema’s potential to disturb dominant modes of world making. The book does not aim to provide a complete overview of global queer cinema, but neither does it completely surrender the idea of the world to globalization. Instead, it makes a case for the centrality of queerness in what we understand as world cinema and for the significance of cinema in making queer worlds. The worldliness of cinema is highly contested space, fought after and instrumentalized in politically suspect ways. But the cooptation of cinematic worlds to neocolonial fantasies and consumer capitalist effects is never achieved with completeness. The dynamics of cinema allow experiences that transcend pragmatism, and the utility of cinema for political ends is always accompanied by a radical instability. So while we maintain cynicism toward

the canonization of a category called “world cinema,” we are also reluctant to relinquish all cinema that poses worldly questions. Despite the success of global market-driven capitalism in systematizing the world, we insist that neoliberalism does not get to own the world. In our individual and collective endeavors, we have listened to other ways of defining the world. For this reason, the essay we co-wrote in our anthology *Global Art Cinema* put forward the idea of “the impurity of art cinema” to reignite the potencies and instabilities of what we felt had become a category of film—arthouse fare—that was too easily dismissed by film scholars as decadent, overly aesthetic, and inherently compromised.<sup>58</sup> To use the term “global” is always a political act and yet few of us can opt out of being subject to the world. We resist a critique that would see any and all renderings of the world as inescapably complicit with globalization.

We are also concerned by an almost kneejerk unwillingness to discuss queers and the world together. In film studies, a critical awareness of the global frame has challenged and revised the traditional rubrics of film studies (inflecting them with categories such as the transnational, diasporic, the exilic, and migrancy) but these debates have often marginalized or excluded queer film. *Queer Cinema in the World* opens out conversations between critical models of queer worlding and rubrics of world cinema. The challenge is to think critiques of the global gaze/gays alongside Ella Shohat and Robert Stam’s view of European spectators as “armchair conquistadors”; to read the racializing logic of the gay international against Fatimah Tobing Rony’s account of the “third eye”; to compare homonationalism with Miriam Hansen’s vernacular modernism; and to add White’s retrospectatorship to Dudley Andrew’s phases of world cinema.<sup>59</sup> Bringing these perspectives together is also our attempt to correct what we see as an avoidance of queer theory by film studies and film theory. Even many of the canonical studies of queer cinema speak apart from queer theory’s most significant challenges to categories of identity, affect, life, and aesthetics. We propose that when thought together, these intellectual traditions rethink the world from the ground up. They simultaneously ask: what do we mean by a world? Do we need a world? If so, why? Is it politically necessary to imagine the scale/space of human living in global terms? In other words, what is having a world good for?

### **Scales of Worldliness**

Andrei Tarkovsky asks, “Why do people go to the cinema?” and concludes that this impulse springs from “the human need to master and know the world.”<sup>60</sup> Our impetus in foregrounding this question comes from our con-

viction, contrary to Tarkovsky's, that people use cinema to know the world without mastering it. For another Soviet filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, the question of the world was also a question of cinema, but the terms of its mastery were less certain. For Eisenstein, cinema collapses physical distance and temporal difference, perverting the proximities within which we ordinarily live. Its spatiality has little to do with what is physically contiguous; instead, Eisenstein's politics of cinematic space was, as Mary Ann Doane has noted, a politics of scale.<sup>61</sup> As she quotes Eisenstein, "The representation of objects in the actual (absolute) proportions proper to them is, of course, merely a tribute to orthodox formal logic. A subordination to an inviolable order of things. . . . Absolute realism is by no means the correct form of perception. It is simply the function of a certain form of social structure."<sup>62</sup> As much as it has the potential to reinforce a social order, naturalizing a certain mode of perception, cinema for Eisenstein also has the potential to de-reify perception by distorting scale. He alerts us to pay attention to how cinema recalibrates scale, because in that operation there is a politics of the world. We know that Eisenstein was keen to unlock cinema's potential to collide spaces and times in order to bring down oppressive hierarchies and radically reorganize the world. We might even say that cinema for him is able to *queer* scale by perverting orthodox proximetrics, collapsing distances, and drawing together various and skewed perspectives. If all cinema plays with admixtures of scale (via composition, montage, and so on), then Eisenstein asks what world we are making when we make cinema.

We draw on this reading of Eisenstein to think cinematic worldliness in terms of queer scales and spaces, juxtaposing his insights with those of recent queer film scholars who take on questions of globality. One such scholar is Helen Hok-Sze Leung, who positions the cinematic as a site in which alternate scales of political, social, and sexual identification can occur. Leung, building on Gordon Brent Ingram, identifies what she calls queer-scapes in a " 'locality of contests' between normative constitutions of identity and less acceptable forms of identification, desire, and contact."<sup>63</sup> Leung lays out the potential for this intersection at an early stage in the debate when she argues that New Queer Cinema should engage Third Cinema, to counter both NQC's dominant Western male point of view and the blind spot Third Cinema often had for sexuality. She points to films such as *Chou jue deng chang/Enter the Clowns* (Cui Zi'en, dir., 2002), *Fresa y chocolate/Strawberry and Chocolate* (Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, dir., 1993), and *Woubi Cheri* (Laurent Boucchut and Philip Brooks, dirs., 1998) as examples of global films that are geopolitically queer:



It is clear that many new queer cinemas are emerging, from the “margins and interstices” of global power. These films are “queer” not only in the sense that they explore sexual and gender practices outside of normative heterosexuality and the dichotomous gender system. They are queer—indeed more than a little strange—because they unsettle current notions of history and politics, while going against conventional paradigms of filmmaking. Most of all, they answer to the legacies of Third Cinema by remaining on the side of the disaffected and disenfranchised.<sup>64</sup>

With Leung, we insist on a mode of cinematic queerness that links sexuality and gender both to textual transgression and to a politics of worldliness. As she writes, “Such a cinema would . . . engage with and resist the decentered and dispersed forms of late capitalist domination that operate transnationally and across different identity formations. There are signs that a new wave of queer films, emerging from diverse locales, are moving in precisely such a direction. Not only do these films explore non-normative sexualities and gender practices from new perspectives, they do so by rendering strange—indeed queering—existent narratives of history and culture as well as the institution of filmmaking.”<sup>65</sup> The structures and shapes of world cinema enable new forms of transnational articulation.

One of these existing narratives is diaspora, which Gopinath redeploys as a means of mapping the vectors and transits of queer desires. Queer diasporic cinema allows us to see spaces of shared desire that are otherwise illegible. It also traverses historical boundaries, borrowing from White’s concept of retrospectatorship. Thus, speaking of the Indian lesbian film *Sancharram/The Journey* (Ligy J. Pullapally, dir., 2004), she writes:

The various genealogies that converge in a text like *Sancharram* can only be traced through . . . a queer diasporic frame, one that would allow us to read the multiple registers within which the film gains meaning: the local, the regional, the national, the diasporic, and the transnational. . . . The film in effect supersedes a national frame; instead it interpolates a transnational lesbian and gay viewership in its framing of the struggle of its heroines through these transnational discourses. *Sancharram* therefore allows us to consider the formation of a transnational lesbian/feminist subject through the use of a regional linguistic and aesthetic idiom.<sup>66</sup>

Neither Leung nor Gopinath gives up on the idea of a spatial politics of transnational identification. For both scholars, there is a political imperative con-