



Erin Y. Huang

Neoliberal
Post-Socialism
and the Limits
of Visibility

URBAN HORROR

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SINOTHEORY

A series edited by Carlos Rojas
and Eileen Cheng-yin Chow

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**Neoliberal Post-Socialism
and the Limits of Visibility**

Erin Y. Huang

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Courtney Leigh Baker

Typeset in Minion Pro by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Huang, Erin Y. (Erin Yu-Tien), [date] author.

Title: Urban horror : neoliberal post-socialism and the limits of visibility / Erin Y. Huang.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2020. | Series: Sinotheory | Extensive and substantial revision of author's thesis (doctoral)—University of California, Irvine, 2012, titled *Capital's abjects : Chinese cinemas, urban horror, and the limits of visibility*. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019024134 (print) | LCCN 2019024135 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478006794 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478008095 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478009108 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Motion pictures—China—History and criticism. | Motion pictures—Political aspects—China. | Motion pictures—Social aspects—China. | Cities and towns in motion pictures.

Classification: LCC PN1993.5.C4 H824 2020 (print) | LCC PN1993.5.C4 (ebook) |

DDC 791.430951—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019024134>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019024135>

Cover art: Lee Ka-sing, *Hong Kong, Someday in 1997*. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the artist.

Duke University Press gratefully acknowledges the University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Princeton University, which provided funds toward the publication of this book.

For Pao-Cheng, Shu-Ling, and Erica Huang

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Acknowledgments

This book grew from a deeply personal desire to understand and describe the spatial and temporal experience growing up in the aftermath of the Cold War in Kaohsiung, a port city and an export-processing zone surrounded by industrial factories that export goods and energy but leave behind toxic pollutions in the island nation of Taiwan. In fierce competition with other Chinese port cities and industrial zones that rapidly expanded after China entered the era of economic reform in the 1980s, Kaohsiung appears in my memory as a crowded urban space that defies the existing definitions of a political or mercantile city. Having neither historical monuments to mark the city's past political and economic significance, nor a flashy financial district to flaunt its newness as a major transportation center located between Southeast and East Asia, the urbanscape of Kaohsiung consists of the infrastructure of global movement, where endless streams of megasize container ships and trucks load and unload. Although the Taiwanese export-processing zone gradually lost its global competitiveness to the special economic zones in China and other developing countries in Southeast Asia, the space that shaped my life remains mysterious and leaves behind unanswered questions: What are the geopolitical forces that created the export-processing zone? Is space also a technology of governmentality that can be engineered and reproduced? What are the contemporary systems of power that continue to create transnational land and oceanic urbanization with not yet legible human and environmental consequences? Looking at the toxic and hazy skyline of Kaohsiung—a space whose name is unfamiliar to many people but that plays a role in the global logistic routes of supply and demand—these questions haunt me.

Yet what concerns me is not the individual case of Kaohsiung but the proliferation of spaces like Kaohsiung—a model of neoliberal experimentation with the production of space that reduces space to reproducible protocols and procedures. The zones are disposable and can always be replicated elsewhere, in a land or country that offers more competitive resources. The spatial technologies behind the practice of zoning can be further developed, providing not only a tool of economic expansionism but also the means to exert political and military control. Kaohsiung highlights the tip of an iceberg in the advancement of the technologies of space in the aftermath of the Cold War. It is a unique vantage point to see the urban transformations taking place in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in what I theorize in this book as the neoliberal post-socialist era. Among the Sinophone regions that I examine, two are islands located between Southeast and East Asia. The frequent references to Southeast Asia in this book are meant to pose questions about regional boundaries and explore newly emergent connections that are created under the deterritorialized imaginary of infinite economic expansion. Rather than focusing on the representations of select cities, I am drawn to the theorization of space as a reproducible sociopolitical mechanism of power that creates new types of spaces—special economic zones, special administrative regions, and science and industrial parks—that occupy central roles in Asia's post-Cold War urban transformation.

The years I spent on researching, thinking, and writing led me to the questions above. The process of writing resembles an archaeological excavation, where I peel away layers to collect the traces of thoughts that appeared in different forms and are in search of a language of articulation. There are innumerable people I need to thank in this process, for selflessly teaching me how to think, for reading numerous versions of chapters and drafts, for believing in me and my ideas when things get messy, for long conversations that open my mind, and for simply being who they are. I thank Ackbar Abbas, who has a mysterious way of reading my mind and untangling my thoughts. His love for experimenting with theory taught me the infinite possibilities of reading. I thank Hu Ying and Jennifer Terry, who taught me the foundations of feminist thinking and the importance of feminist doing. Their influence on my work cannot be described in words, and their generosity will always be passed on to my colleagues and students. I want to give special thanks to Jonathan M. Hall for inspiring my passion for film and media theory and for always pushing me to think beyond my limits.

This book underwent radical transformation in the intellectual environment of Princeton University. I am privileged to work alongside Steven

Chung and Franz Prichard. The almost daily conversations we had led to the creation of Asia Theory Visuality, an interdisciplinary platform where we dream of conducting all kinds of intellectual experiments that range from conferences and workshops to media projects and installations. Their friendship and companionship sustained me through the ambitious and challenging process of writing this book. My colleagues at Princeton gave unrelenting support to all my intellectual ventures. I thank Martin Kern, Anna Shields, Thomas Hare, Willard Peterson, Sheldon Garon, Thomas Conlan, Paize Keulemans, Federico Marcon, Amy Borovoy, Janet Chen, Atsuko Ueda, He Bian, Ksenia Chizhova, Brian Steininger, Xin Wen, Jing Wang, April Alliston, Leonard Barkan, Wendy Laura Belcher, David Bellos, Sandra Bermann, Marina Brownlee, Benjamin Conisbee Baer, Susana Draper, Karen Emmerich, Daniel Heller-Roazen, Lital Levy, Alexander Nehamas, Eileen Reeves, Anne Anlin Cheng, Zahid R. Chaudhary, Kinohi Nishikawa, Devin Fore, and Katherine Hill Reischl. I want to thank Kat especially, for initiating conversations about comparative studies of socialisms and post-socialisms. Our discussions resulted in the PIIRS-funded international conference “The Geopolitical Aesthetics of Post-Socialisms: China, Russia, and Beyond” in 2017. In addition to an intellectually stimulating environment, Princeton University generously supported a semester of leave to complete the writing of this book and awarded me the Professor Uwe E. Reinhardt and Julis-Rabinowitz Family University Preceptorship in Multidisciplinary Studies.

Whenever people ask what gives me joy in what I do, my answer has always been the opportunity to meet and grow with the most amazing people and the most brilliant minds. My writing is inseparable from the drinks and meals, laughter and tears, and the thought-provoking chats that I shared with these people: Arnika Fuhrmann, Yomi Braester, Shu-mei Shih, Carlos Rojas, Jerome Silbergeld, Peter Brooks, Xudong Zhang, Rebecca Karl, Thomas Looser, Akira Lippit, Margaret Hillenbrand, Tomiko Yoda, Alexander Zhaltan, Feng-Mei Heberer, Zhang Zhen, Lily Chumley, Michelle Cho, Kim Icreverzi, Jason McGrath, Weihong Bao, Victor Fan, Guo-Juin Hong, Jenny Chio, Luke Robinson, Calvin Hui, Pooja Rangan, Ma Ran, Jean Tsui, Corey Byrnes, Ari Larissa Heinrich, Thomas Lamarre, Yuriko Furuhashi, Marc Steinberg, Joshua Neves, Wang Ban, Yiman Wang, Poshek Fu, Diane Lewis, Paul Roquet, Christine Marran, Thy Phu, Ju-Hui Judy Han, Christopher Tong, Nick Admussen, Moonim Baek, Winnie Yee, We Jung Yi, Phillip Kaffen, Olga Fedorenko, Megan Steffen, Laurence Coderre, Yun-Jong Lee, Yuka Kano, Seo Young Park, Hyun Seon Park, Chungmoo Choi, Kyung

Hyun Kim, Bert Scruggs, Eyal Amiran, Rei Terada, Jane Newman, Tiffany Tsai, Ying Qian, Li Jie, Jill Jarvis, Catherine Reilly, Qinyuan Lei, Anindita Banerjee, Heather Inwood, Guangchen Chen, Shaoling Ma, Weijie Song, Angelina Lucento, Jennifer Dorothy Lee, Ying-Fen Huang, Hwa-Jen Tsai, Sheldon Lu, Astrid Møller-Olsen, Michael Schoenhals, Jie Lu, Frederike Schneider-Vielsäcker, Loïc Aloisio, Pamela Hunt, Christina Chuang, and graduate students at Princeton who never cease to inspire me, Chan Yong Bu, Junnan Heather Chen, and Darja Filippova. Special thanks go to the filmmaker Cong Feng, who generously shared his films with me. I also wish to thank Victoria Hsieh, who did amazing work untangling my thoughts and sentences in the early stage of preparing the book manuscript. I still remember the day she sat and listened to the concept of urban horror when we were both in graduate school. The experience of writing this book is a token of our friendship.

Without the enthusiasm and unrelenting support from the people at Duke University Press, this book would not have been possible. I thank Ken Wissoker, who understood the core of this project within minutes of our conversation and gave me unlimited freedom to write. I am grateful for Carlos Rojas and Eileen Chow for generously including the book in the Sinotheory series. With utmost sincerity, I thank the book's two anonymous readers. It was an amazing experience to read and think about their eloquently composed comments that made me realize how far many ideas could actually go. Their vision for the book and their excitement for the direction it takes are the best encouragement I have ever received. At the Press, I thank Joshua Tranen, Susan Albury, and the entire team for taking great care with this project.

At last, I wish to express my infinite gratitude to my family for always giving me strength at unexpected turns of life. It was their unconditional love and kindness that made me realize the depth of humanity. They are the reason for what I do.

An earlier version of chapter 2 was published in *positions: asia critique* 27, no. 2 (2019): 333–60. An earlier and shorter version of chapter 3 was published in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 13, no. 1 (2019): 42–60.

Introduction. Urban Horror

Speculative Futures of Chinese Cinemas

On October 1, 2014, the National Day of the People's Republic of China, a celebration takes place in the city of Hong Kong, a former British colony now ruled as a special administrative region under China's policy of "one country, two systems." As fireworks illuminate Hong Kong's skyline, the scene on the ground reveals an entirely different landscape. The streets are filled with people and engulfed in a chemical cloud. The police are shooting tear gas at the crowd to disperse the nonviolent and unarmed demonstrators demanding democracy in what will later be called the Umbrella Movement. Against the darkness of the sky, the fireworks' brilliant colors shine above the protest zones that have been transformed into urban battlegrounds. Shots are fired and canisters of tear gas fly across crowded protest sites, where irritant chemicals touch and penetrate the demonstrators' bodies. In the opening scene of Chan Tze-woon's *Yellowing* (*Luanshi beiwang*, 2016)—a documentary that archives the Hong Kong filmmaker's intimate observations of the protesters and their lived experiences in the Occupy movement—the camera captures the chaotic scene as it gazes at Hong Kong's iconic skyscrapers lit up with celebratory slogans in red (see figure I.1). "Prosperous nation; flourishing families [*Guorong jiasheng*]," the

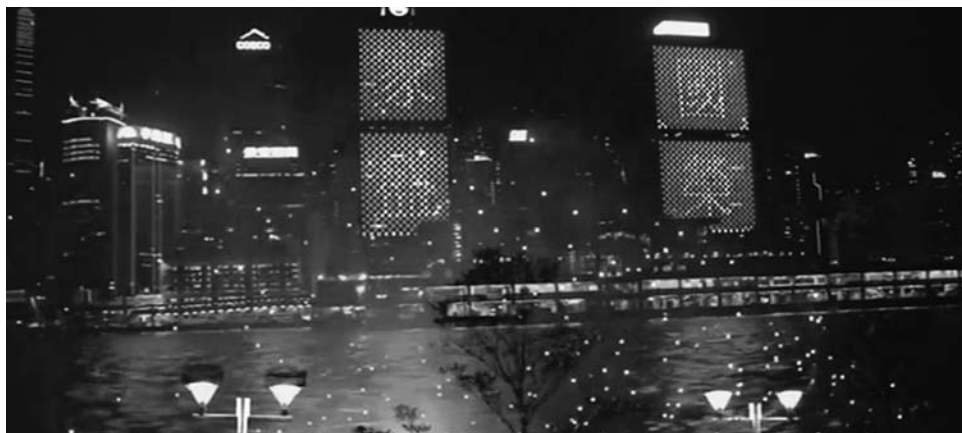


FIGURE 1.1. The camera in *Yellowing* (2016) captures the chaotic scene of the Umbrella Movement as it gazes at Hong Kong's iconic skyscrapers lit up with celebratory slogans in red.

slogan says. Yet it is unclear who the families are and what defines wealth and prosperity. Accentuated as part of the ordinary landscape of post-handover Hong Kong, the image complicates the meaning of “one country, two systems,” in which the imaginary coexistence of socialism and capitalism rehearses a futurity that I theorize as neoliberal post-socialism, referring to a deterritorialized form of market post-socialism and a new global system without a (proper) name that is actively reshaping the lived conditions of the present. The combination of neoliberalism and post-socialism puts the conventional definitions of these terms into question and probes the socialist origin of neoliberalism, suggesting a globally expanding market economy without *laissez-faire* that depends on state intervention, wherein the definition of the state and its relationship with the market undergoes radical transformations.

The Chinese state's suppression of a protest movement demanding political sovereignty and freedom in Hong Kong—a space of neoliberal post-socialist experimentation—illustrates that freedom under “one country, two systems” is a flexible façade, its meaning subject to infinite manipulation and redefinition. The gap between the freedom of free trade and the freedom to perform political sovereignty only highlights the centralized flexibility of neoliberal post-socialist state power rather than its diminishment. Putting the spatial and temporal assumptions of Chinese post-socialism into ques-

tion, the script in red captured in *Yellowing* that is written into Hong Kong's urban landscape suggests a new direction of critical inquiry—specifically, a form of post-socialism in a formerly nonsocialist region of Asia that demands new understandings of what the *post-* in post-socialism means and how its versatility is deployed to dissolve and articulate new borders in the aftermath of the Cold War.

In *Yellowing's* opening scenes, the camera wavers between the spectacles above and below, until they are merged in the same frame, contiguous and indistinguishable. The cuts and movements of the camera suggest the desire to evoke the invisible interrelations in an intensifying ecology of violence that lies beyond the literal representation of clashing police and protesters in a political and economic zone of exception. The force of the images is further conveyed through the film's soundtrack, where the sounds of exploding tear gas canisters and fireworks are mixed with the cry of the crowd, transforming distant images of the protest into an intimate sensory experience. As if tracing the imperceptible connections between two urban landscapes and their incomprehensible juxtaposition, the camera is guided and motivated by an invisible force, a public sentiment that this book investigates: the *urban horror* that springs up when the excesses of contemporary violence embedded in the neoliberal production of space overwhelm the existing frames of cognition. The visible becomes illegible and is deployed in the film to highlight the gap between conflicting realities that are associated with Hong Kong—one as the territory of China, and the other one as a sovereign land. The revolution takes place not only on the street but also in a film produced after the assembly of protesting bodies in the Umbrella Movement came to an end. Rather than a memorial of the demonstration, *Yellowing's* treatment of footage taken during the protest is an experiment with the future of the image. The urban protest has ceased. Yet the potentiality of the image in an image-saturated world has not been fully explored. Drawing attention to urban horror allows for a discussion of the speculative forces of cinema from the 1990s to the present. *Urban horror* is the term I use to denote an emergent horizon of affects, indicating a communicative network of emotions where cumulative intensities of feelings that are searching for new forms of expression travel and disseminate through mediated informational and sensory channels. Looking at cinema from this period urges us to reimagine resistance *after* the presumed end of revolutionary times, in the aftermath of the end of revolutionary Chinese socialism and the catastrophic Tiananmen Square protest of 1989.

Urban Horror: Toward a Theory of Marxist Phenomenology

Distinct from the legible forms of Euro-American gothic literature and the Hollywood-centric horror genre that already propose a provocative history of monstrous bodies and their relations to the violence of capitalism (e.g., Dr. Frankenstein's monster, Dracula, the phantom of the opera, etc.), urban horror continues this line of inquiry but shifts focus to the post-Cold War, contemporary Sinophone world, including China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Here the continuities and discontinuities of socialist, post-socialist, capitalist, and neoliberal economic histories pose new questions about the relationship between aesthetics (i.e., the forms of cultural ambivalence and resistance) and politics (i.e., the geopolitical and economic system shaping global orders). This relationship is particularly relevant for the time period under discussion, in which the era of neoliberal post-socialist economic transformation corresponds to the era of hypermediality, referring to the transformations in the meaning of the image and its relation to the concept of reality, when the production of the image no longer depends on an externally existing reality and now exists in the realm of digital technologies and computer algorithms.¹ In this book about the aesthetics of cinema—with discussions of texts that were produced when the concept of the image and its power to shape reality underwent fundamental changes during the media revolution after the Cold War—the motivating question concerns how the cinematic aesthetics of urban horror play a role in dramatizing, influencing, and shaping future urban revolutions that may or may not ever be actualized.

Horror—a socially produced affect that responds to contemporaneous forms of violence and that is basically antirepresentational but requires a form of representation—has produced a new species of monstrous bodies in the Euro-American tradition since the Industrial Revolution. Proposing a Marxist sociology of the modern monster, Franco Moretti links the emergence of capitalism and nineteenth-century monsters: “The fear of bourgeois civilization is summed up in two names: Frankenstein and Dracula.” Interpreting both as “totalizing” monsters that are distinct from earlier bodies of monstrosity, Moretti reads Dr. Frankenstein's monster as “a pregnant metaphor of the process of capitalist production, which forms by deforming, civilizes by barbarizing, enriches by impoverishing—a two-sized process in which each affirmation entails a negation.” Whereas Frankenstein's monster resembles the conditions of the proletariat, denied a name and individuality, Dracula represents the antirepresentational Capital itself, alluding to an incorporeal vampiric body of accumulation that “impelled towards a continuous growth, an unlimited expansion of his domain.”² Jack Halberstam

further suggests a Foucauldian approach to historically shifting concepts of monstrosity when he traces a new genealogy of horror in a combined study of nineteenth-century gothic literature and twentieth-century horror films. Calling for an investigation of specific racialized and sexualized bodies and the social affects they mediate, Halberstam's analysis of gothic horror, which begins with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and ends with Dr. Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), illustrates that monstrosity is a historically contingent concept shaped by the technologies of representation.³ Yet, as this genealogy of gothic horror that extends from literature to contemporary Euro-American film culture suggests, the notion of totalizing monsters whose bodies provide an identifiable form of representation amid contemporaneous, antirepresentational systems of violence has witnessed a change in recent decades. The bodies of monstrosity continue to exist but are regenrefied through waves of commodified nostalgia in the form of remakes and sequels. The bodies of hybrid humans-machines as well as vampires and zombies still serve as cultural metaphors for anxieties over capitalist accumulation, technological advancement, and the alienation of human labor. However, the emergence of cultural texts without an identifiable agent of horror, where monstrous bodies are replaced by nature, an invisible virus, or another unspecified calamity, suggests a diffusion of body-centered horror and an increasingly noticeable gap between currently existing cultural forms of representation and the excesses of contemporary systems of violence that await naming. The study of neoliberal, post-socialist urban horror takes up this gap and theorizes the historical conditions leading up to the diffusion of horror.

Before introducing the geopolitical and economic transformations of neoliberal post-socialism and the new aesthetic forms of urban horror, the term *horror* requires more careful theorization. The brief history of Euro-American gothic horror presented above complicates the meaning of *horror*, especially when the term is conflated with the study of horror as a genre. The word refers to a commodity of attraction where monstrosity is exhibited as a spectacle, producing sensationalized social affects that allow spectators to enjoy the feelings of thrill and fear that are sold as horror; it also suggests an elusive sensory communicative channel, where the excessiveness and incomprehensibility of the global systems that shape the conditions of everyday life emerge as sights and sounds that overwhelm the senses and the capacity to think. Rather than pursuing a horror genre study where the focus is often on categorizing a collection of cultural texts and figures using a legible convention—generally already defined in the aesthetic and

economic traditions of Euro-American productions of body-centered horror—my interest lies in the second definition, which opens up horror as a historical mode of perception arising when the perceived external reality exceeds one's internal frame of comprehension.

To further elaborate on this definition of horror as a constantly morphing assemblage of social forces that conjure different bodies, spaces, temporalities, images, and sounds—rather than a scripted and commodified feeling that is presumed to be uniform throughout history and across languages and cultures—we can examine the history of horror in Chinese cinema. Introduced as part of urban spectacle and consumer culture in Republican Shanghai, Ma-Xu Weibang's *Song at Midnight* (*Yeban gesheng*, 1937) is recognized as the first Chinese horror film. It is modeled after Rupert Julian's Hollywood film *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), which in turn is based on French writer Gaston Leroux's serialized novel depicting a ghost-like, disfigured man who haunts the Paris Opera House. Ma-Xu obsessed over makeup artistry, and the film's success in introducing a sensationalized grotesque body was further amplified by the technology of sound. Due to sound media's dissemination of the film's theme songs, the phantom's presence did not depend on the theatrical release of the film but could be found in any space in the urban fabric connected by sound technology. As Zhang Zhen argues, *Song at Midnight* introduced an acoustic horror to Chinese cinema, where the technologies of sound combined with the visual techniques of making monsters on screen, leading to the film's unrivaled popularity.⁴ However, like the careers of many other Shanghai filmmakers of the Republican era, Ma-Xu's work was interrupted by the Chinese Civil War (1945–49) fought between the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang Party following the end of World War II.

The account of the horror genre's origin in China reveals, first, the displacement of a Shanghai filmmaker to Hong Kong in the postwar era, where Ma-Xu continued to make sequels to *Song at Midnight*, and, second, the obscured history of “Chinese horror” as an artistic experimentation with a Western form and a part of a globally circulating cosmopolitan urban culture that was produced in a semicolonial Chinese port city. As one of the first treaty ports opened to free trade with the West after the First Opium War in 1842, Shanghai was ruled under semicolonialism, the city divided into concessions that were ceded to foreign control. Produced under the condition of semicolonialism, the horror that was born in the city does not speak to the realities of colonialism but rather presents itself as a cinematic and technological attraction. Flaunting itself as an artistic achievement that longs

for the film spectators' acknowledgment, the monster in *Song at Midnight* does not hide behind the camera but longs to be seen. To further enhance the pleasures of the Chinese phantom as a cinematic spectacle, the phantom is given the benevolent identity of a leftist revolutionary who fought against feudal landlords. Calling the Chinese phantom Song Danping a "benevolent monster," Yomi Braester further notes the creation of this Chinese monster as part of a "theatrical phantasmagoria."⁵ Changing the urban setting of *The Phantom of the Opera* to an unspecified scenic countryside in *Song at Midnight*, the Chinese adaptation stays away from the space of semicolonialism, so the phantom's disfigured and scarred face can be loved as a humanized spectacle in a cinematic excursion to the countryside.

In a milieu filled with the desire to become modern—to be contemporaneous with the cultural and artistic metropolitan West without confronting the colonial West—*Song at Midnight's* obsession with new cinematic aesthetics and technologies associated with cosmopolitan horror is representative of the political unconscious that motivated the production of Shanghai modernisms.⁶ Instead of presenting a Shanghai urbanscape that was fissured and controlled by competing Western colonial powers, *Song at Midnight* is arguably celebrating the Chinese reinvention of commodified Euro-American horror. The sensationalized horror that the film associates with the phantom's disfigured body remains a part of Shanghai's New Sensationalism, which flourished before the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. A critical rereading of Chinese horror's origin story reveals that the body-centered horror genre is a globally circulating commodity and an aesthetics of cultural translation. The camera's love of the phantom's face, seen in prolonged close-ups and multiperspective angle shots, evokes the fascination and allure with cosmopolitan urban culture rather than the communicative channel of emergent feelings that respond to the contemporaneous forms of systematized violence. The horror associated with *Song at Midnight* refers to a commodified thrill and not the sentiment that arises in the face of an unnamable crisis. Therefore, distinguishing horror as a commodified genre and a sensory communicative channel poses new questions about the history of horror in modern China, especially while considering the socialist era and the socialist realist cinema that indirectly banned the production of horror genre films. This distinction also opens up a new breadth of texts across multiple genres that probe the meaning of horror as the gap of cognition produced under the intensive conditions of capitalist, socialist, and neoliberal post-socialist economic developments.

According to Rei Terada's historicization of feelings in theory, drawing from the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Gilles Deleuze, and others, emotions arise from the gap between one's perceived interiority and the realities that are associated with the external world. For this reason, emotions always already exceed the limit of one's imagined subjecthood. And the emergence of emotions depends on a phenomenological process in which human feelings (i.e., the biological, the interior, the subjective, etc.) are the result of sociopolitical processes.⁷ Terada's analysis sheds new light on the common narrative that emotions are an expression of an ingrained and universal human nature, leading to new questions about the normative definition of horror as the expression (i.e., externalization) of an internally existing and innate subjective feeling. For this reason, this book theorizes horror as the torsion between socially constructed interiors and exteriors and moves away from the expressive hypothesis of emotion. As illustrated in *Yellowing's* evocation of contemporary Hong Kong as sights and sounds that are visible but incomprehensible—where a perceived externality exceeds the audience's previously existing frame of interior cognition—the question that emerges is the role of visual media in creating public sensory channels that are actively producing feelings of not knowing how to feel and disseminating sentiments and affects that are in search of reactions to a newly discovered present. Accentuating the gap between vision and cognition, contemporary urban horror is consciously produced and sustained. The emergence of horror means the paralysis of the former order of the world and its system of signification, revealing them as the structures that condition our knowledge of the world and potentially igniting what Jacques Rancière calls a revolution of the sensible world.⁸

From the comparative analysis of Euro-American and Chinese horror genres, it becomes clear that horror as a commodity genre and horror as a sociopolitical sentiment of potential dissent are distinct. Whereas the former has generated distinguished studies, thinking about the latter kind of horror requires a new genealogy of the history of feelings in political theory. The affective excess that the camera in *Yellowing* evokes highlights the social function of horror as a communicative channel of public sentiment that was already present in nineteenth-century Marxist urban theory based on industrializing European cities. The sentiments and affects that were disseminated in the critique of capitalism have a specific urban setting that probes the relationship between capitalism and the systematized production of space. To further theorize the circulation of contemporary urban horror, an early Marxist text that describes the emergence of factory towns helps

shed light on, first, the phenomenological method of observing the impact of the industrialization of space, and second, the birth of an industrial horror that belongs to the modern era. Derived from Friedrich Engels's early writing, in a text that I read as a Marxist phenomenological treatise on an English factory town, horror performs the role of describing the sentiment that arises when human subjects are seen as no longer commensurable with the abstracting industrial landscape. In classical Marxian theory, questions about the modern city never have the same scope as they do in Engels's early work.⁹ In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Engels records his experience working at his father's cotton mill in the factory town of Manchester from 1842 to 1844. In chapters that detail the urban sensoria he experienced as a young adult—from the sights and smells of workers' dwelling spaces and their deteriorating bodies, to the emergence of new slums amid the infrastructural network of industrial railways and bridges—the visible sight of Manchester paradoxically became incomprehensible. He writes, "Everything which here arouses horror and indignation is of recent origin, belongs to the *industrial epoch*."¹⁰ "Horror," in this case, is not used to preach moralism and resentment, an approach that can obscure and paralyze the potential for radical critique. Rather, Engels's statement draws a distinction between the perceived reactive sensations and the true causes of the problem that remain in the dark. A set of implied questions emerges regarding the horror and indignation that are tied to the industrial epoch—an industrial horror. Already suggesting a Marxian structure of feeling, the affects that pervade Engels's urban treatise refer not to inherent humanist expressions but to emotive categories that are created in the abstracting system of capitalist industrial modernity. The horror is socially produced and refers to a set of social relations that materialized in a quintessentially capitalist affect that ramifies through homogenizing processes of global urbanization. The work that horror performs here is the opening of a phenomenological channel of perception that introduces the body as a perceptive surface where the external conditions of capitalist abstraction are producing a new kind of human sensation, appearing whenever a gap is opened between one's imagined interior reality and the perceived external world. Once the gap closes, horror disappears, or becomes the conventional, scripted horror that no longer unsettles the perception of reality.

The Condition of the Working Class in England represents an early Marxist critique of the capitalist production of space that also probes the potentialities of an industrial horror in rehearsing and inciting future revolutions. The text is a performative theorization of not only a capitalist affect but also

the emergence of Marxist phenomenology, a method of inquiry that unravels the human sensorium as the torsion of interiorities and exteriorities, wherein lies the desires, anxieties, ambivalences, and potential strategies of resistance toward an invisible totality called Capital. The emphasis on capitalism alone was further complicated, considering the histories of socialisms that competed with the capitalist mode of production that climaxed during the twentieth century. To trace the genealogy of Marxist phenomenology against the backdrop of intensifying urbanization of the last century, the writings of the urban theorist Henri Lefebvre and the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty bring into view a set of historical mediations and debates on the body as a surface of perception and a site of individual consciousness when the boundary between capitalism and socialism that produces military-industrial urbanization began to blur.

The question of individuality and individual consciousness in the Marxist imaginary of collective action and revolution represents a particular strand of Marxist intellectual history, present in the work of Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Georg Lukács, and Antonio Gramsci.¹¹ The theoretical inquiry into the place for subjects and subjecthood in Marxist thought became the foundation for existential Marxism in postwar European society. Represented by the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, their contribution (especially the latter's) to Marxist theory remains an ongoing theoretical debate. Sartre's visit to China in 1955, for example, opens up a new intellectual horizon for thinking about Sino-French Marxist humanism during the Cold War as an important component of the global 1960s.¹² Compared to Sartre, whose name is often associated with Marxist thinkers of the same generation, the ambiguity of Merleau-Ponty's Marxist writings and his early death contributed to the underexploration of his existential Marxism.¹³ In addition to Merleau-Ponty's multiple books on the subject of Marxism in response to Lukács, G. W. F. Hegel, and the young Marx, *Phenomenology of Perception*, *Humanism and Terror*, and the later *Adventures of the Dialectic* represent an extensive body of work that wrestles with the relationship between phenomenological inquiry and Marxist historical materialism. For example, in "Marxism and Philosophy," Merleau-Ponty explains the linkage between Marxism and phenomenology: "If it is neither a 'social nature' given outside ourselves, nor the 'World Spirit,' nor the movement appropriate to ideas, nor collective consciousness, *then what is, for Marx, the vehicle of history and the motivating force of the dialectic?* It is man involved in a certain way of appropriating nature in which the mode of his relationship with others takes shape; it is concrete human intersub-

jectivity, the successive and simultaneous community of existences in the process of self-realization in a type of ownership which they both submit to and transform, each created by and creating the other.”¹⁴ For Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological method does not attribute human experience to reactive responses toward external stimuli, nor does it attribute human experience to consciousness that springs from an internal essence. Rather, it is a critical inquiry that theorizes the body-subject in motion and that looks at how concepts of the world are formed through mobile perspectives and intersubjectivity. Through continuously forming relations that blur the boundaries of the body-world-beyond, the phenomenological theory of the body is already a theory of perception, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in *The Phenomenology of Perception*.¹⁵ Opening up the field of perception as the site of an infinitely expandable torsion of the exterior and interior worlds, phenomenology suggests an open-endedness and temporality to social relations that are also at the core of Marx’s theory of Capital, in which Marx theorizes Capital not as a thing but as a “social relation of production.”¹⁶ A person, a thing, or a machine becomes a part of Capital only when it is entered into a social relation of production. Marxism and phenomenology’s shared emphasis on intersubjectivity and social relation as infinitely expandable processes binds them together and opens up room for potential collaboration.

In the writings of Lefebvre, exemplified by *The Production of Space* (*La production de l’espace*) that critiques the competitive Cold War urban industrial development in both capitalist and socialist blocs, Marxist phenomenology can be further explored with Lefebvre’s elusive theorization of “lived experience” and “lived space” as strategies of resistance. Emphasizing that “space” is not a thing but a cumulative process of rendering space reproducible, Lefebvre’s Marxist urban theory moves through different spatial categories, beginning with absolute space, transitioning to abstract space and contradictory space, and ending with differential space as the site of consciousness and the locus of the performative production of differences.¹⁷ In addition to writing against the systematized abstraction of space, *The Production of Space* is also a theory that speculates the place and role of the body in producing the space of resistance. Specifically, the meaning of the book’s title is twofold: one refers to the production of “space” by rendering space into a thing-like object and repeatable procedures, and another refers to the production of the space of resistance. Appearing throughout the text, the body figures centrally as another type of space. For example, Lefebvre asks:

Can the body, with its capacity for action, and its various energies, be said to create space? Assuredly, but not in the sense that occupation might be said to “manufacture” spatiality; rather, there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before *producing* itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing* itself by generating other bodies, each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies.¹⁸

Using a set of vocabulary that evokes the “living” body—rhythms, gestures, beyond “subject” and “object”—Lefebvre treats the body as an “enigma” that has the capacity to “produce differences ‘unconsciously’ out of repetitions.” The capitalist production of objectified space is countered with body-centered spatial practices that can arguably take any form, as they emerge out of contingency. Lefebvre’s Marxist phenomenological theorization of the body stops here, reaching a limit and leaving the “differential body” to the imagination. What the “body” means is never clarified in Lefebvre’s prolific writings. Not referring to the biological body, it becomes instead an elusive synonym for a set of spatial and temporal practices that produce what Lefebvre describes as “energies,” “laws of space,” “occupation,” and “spatiality.”¹⁹ The temporal dimension of the differential body is central to his theorization of resistance, for it implies repetition, dispersal, and dissemination—in other words, an unspecified network of communication that extends from the body to the ultimate transformation and disruption of the urban fabric, leading to the discussion of the dissemination of contemporary urban horror and cinema’s role in helping to produce a *different* space.

In texts that were written in response to the global urban uprisings of 1968 with a vantage point of continental Europe, Lefebvre’s elusive descriptions of the “differential body” and “differential space” that are envisioned as embodied actions and performativity of resistance against both capitalism and socialism pose old and new questions to the neoliberal post-socialist system that arose in the aftermath of the Cold War. Highlighting the indistinguishability of capitalist and socialist production of space, Lefebvre’s Marxist phenomenology is already mapping the emergence of a mutative system—without a (proper) name—that thrives on the combined structure

of capitalism and socialism. To elaborate on the contemporary conditions producing the “urban” in urban horror, the next section focuses on the emergence of Chinese neoliberal post-socialism, a contemporary system beyond capitalism and socialism that resides in the imaginaries of the post-.

Neoliberal Post-Socialism: A Globalizing System without a (Proper) Name

The juxtaposition of fireworks and police tear-gassing captured in *Yellowing* in a space like Hong Kong—a historical zone of exception that evolved from a colonial port city ceded to England in the nineteenth century to the PRC’s special administrative region after 1997—raises questions about the deployment of horror as a public sentiment of dissent in a documentary produced in the aftermath of the Umbrella Movement and about the evocation of a new system of political and economic extraction whose name is not yet determinable. The sights and sounds of urban horror the film disseminates are produced and mediated by a unique urban landscape that is constructed by spatial technologies that already exceed Engels’s description of a nineteenth-century factory town. Increasingly integrated in the archipelagoes of South China’s expanding special economic zones that are creating an underexplored history of global post-socialism, Hong Kong is a case that illustrates the post-socialist spatial technology of creating and managing proliferating zones of exception in and outside of post-socialist China for the purpose of political integration and financial profitability. I will leave the detailed study of post-socialism in Hong Kong to chapter 4. The evocation of the urban that now mediates the production of affect in the media of resistance requires a more detailed introduction, beginning with a fundamental rethinking of what Chinese post-socialism means, the kinds of deterritorializing histories it engenders, and the work that post- as a sliding signifier performs. It is one task to meticulously compile a post-socialist urban history that includes architectural designs, engineering blueprints, finance reports, and environmental evaluations for the numerous megaports, bridges, expressways, dams, canals, railways, and energy plants. It is another to theorize the “production of space” under the condition of Sinocentric neoliberal post-socialism, whose complexity I present below.²⁰

From the collapse of the Soviet Empire to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the past few decades have witnessed a surge of narratives recounting and imagining the end of socialism and the beginning of the neoliberal post-socialist era. However, as post- becomes a common trope used to describe the geopolitical and

economic relations between the capitalist and socialist blocs after the Cold War, the imagined spatiality of post-*socialism*—especially the issue of whether it is a phenomenon happening only within formerly socialist countries—highlights an area of opacity that the emphasis on neoliberal post-socialism addresses. As the dissolution of socialist state powers swept across Eastern Europe and China, creating a diverse variety of post-socialist pathways after 1989, what is commonly perceived as the end of the Cold War was in reality the beginning of a new historical moment that we can characterize as the era of neoliberal post-socialism.²¹ Distinct from the post-socialism that refers to the historical transformation of the juridical, economic, and political structures of formerly socialist states and societies, neoliberal post-socialism refers to the ongoing formation and rearticulation of the geopolitical relations between formerly socialist and nonsocialist countries in the era of the post-. Considering their intensifying economic, political, and cultural interdependence, where post-socialism begins and where it ends becomes conceptually blurred. Yet the idea of a world that has moved past Cold War divisions seeps into the political unconscious of the global post-socialist world and motivates new financial, infrastructural, technological, and transnational neocolonial projects. A new logic of the post-is at work, and calls for an excavation of the post—a site where the anticipation of the post- generates lived global histories that expand like a rhizome with incommensurable differences—that each chapter of this book presents. The attention to lateral and comparative histories of post-socialism—with special attention to the formation of post-socialist relations between the PRC and the rest of the world—is the underlying theme that motivates this study.

To analyze the new logic of the post-, one needs to consider its proliferation in the post-Cold War era. As post-socialism became ubiquitous in describing the end of socialism during the early 1990s, the idea of post-capitalism—an information-based knowledge society that ended capitalism as the developed First World knew it—was also being introduced.²² The co-existence of these notions emphasizes how the iterations of post-Cold War geopolitical relations are in search of a new name and a new spatial-temporal metaphor. The crisis of socialism also reflects the crisis of capitalism, highlighting a bigger issue that remains elusive and opaque. Rather than making a case for the end of either socialism or capitalism, neoliberal post-socialism considers their interrelation and reads the proliferation of the post- as the symptom of a new economic rationality: the logic of the post-X.

Although the post- is commonly associated with a mode of anticipation that evokes a different future path, the temporal logic embedded in the rhetoric of post-socialism is paradoxically hyphenated and reverts back to

socialism. The anticipation is built upon a mode of regression, where the future is conceptualized through indeterminable relations with a former system that is neither alive nor dead. Rather than describing a new era to come, the post- conjoins a suspended future with a reimagined past. The result is a new mode of temporality characterized by infinite deferment and a prolonged anticipation of a future that may never come. The global post-socialist condition can thus be characterized as a perpetually extended *present* that renders the traditional categories of past, present, and future obsolete (see chapter 3).²³ Therefore, I use the post- not to describe the era following the end of the Cold War but to ask how the post- is put to work as a temporalized and spatialized imaginary in the production of post-socialism as a global reality. The new global condition that characterizes the present is not so much the end of socialisms as the emergence of a post-X logic, where the allusive power of the post- and the conjoining effect of the hyphen contribute to an extended and intensified present, leaving in question the place of the past, the role of the future, and the power of the post- that subjects both to infinite redefinitions.

The post- as an active cultural field that is continuously remade to rehearse the desires and anxieties of an era can be glimpsed from the term's intellectual history in English-language scholarship. In the year of the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, Arif Dirlik described post-socialism in a hopeful light, calling it "a radical vision of the future" that "offers the possibility in the midst of a crisis in socialism of rethinking socialism in a new, more creative ways."²⁴ Still envisioning a distinction between post-socialism and capitalism in a text written in the 2000s, Xudong Zhang describes the post- in post-socialism as a potential space of resistance against global capitalism: "Like the prefix *post-* in *post-colonialism*, the *post-* in *post-socialism* indicates a new socioeconomic and cultural-political subjectivity which prefigures the new but is embedded in an order of things that does not readily recognize the ideological claim, political legitimacy, and cultural validity of capitalist globalization for the totality of human history and its future horizon."²⁵ Yet in his study of emergent post-socialist cultural forms of the 1990s and 2000s and their relationship with market forces, Jason McGrath defines post-socialism as global capitalism: "I argue that not only have the forces of marketization resulted in a new cultural logic in China, but this development is part of a global condition of post-socialist modernity and must be understood in the context of the history of the global capitalist system, which not only transforms China but also is thereby transformed."²⁶ Rather than a stable and consistent concept, the meaning of the post- evolved from

a utopianized beginning of a new era to the synonym of global capitalism, revealing the function of the post- as a sliding signifier that mediates the relationship between China's past and future, while both are subject to infinite reconstructions. Absent from these definitions is the consideration of post-socialism(s) that can no longer be contained in the territorial borders of formerly socialist countries, as a globally imagined post- shifts the course of history and spatial expansion after the Cold War.

Temporal anticipation defines the global condition of post-socialism, referring not only to the disintegration of an organized alternative to capitalism but also to an emergent post-socialist economic rationality, where the post- becomes an essential instrument for maximizing and managing a conceptual space of flexible ambiguity that aids the creation of transterritorial, neoliberal technologies of economic extraction and political integration. Instead of periodizing a bygone era that is no longer relevant in the temporal logic of global capitalism—with the assumption that post-socialism is an interchangeable synonym for global capitalism—I examine post-socialism as a present global condition affecting the entire world, with an emphasis on Chinese post-socialism as a mutative and transregional imaginary creating concrete post-socialist histories in the PRC and the Sinophone world beyond.²⁷ I choose the phrase *Chinese post-socialism* rather than “PRC post-socialism” to invoke the flexibility and ambiguity that are associated with the former in the creation of transregional economic integration. The post- refers to an empty signifier where tangible historical meanings and consequences are created, as the prefix is claimed and reclaimed in different geopolitical and national contexts. Evoking a future that is framed as the aftermath to an obfuscated past, the structure of the post-X—with the emphasis on the post- and a system that conjoins—captures the underlying operational techniques in the mutative system of neoliberal post-socialism, where the contingent iterations of neoliberalism depend on the condition of global post-socialism.

The term *neoliberal post-socialism* arises out of the desire to theorize an impasse in the study of the contemporary Sinophone world after China implemented economic reform policies in 1978. The crisis manifests most visibly in the static language available to describe the decades of economic and political expansions and integrations that have taken place across and beyond the Sinophone world. From socialism with Chinese characteristics to market socialism, late socialism, and post-socialism, to capitalism, late capitalism, state capitalism, and neoliberalism, the proliferation of terms and conceptual frameworks used to identify China's state-managed and globally