

Fantasy at Work: The Material and Ideological Conditions of the Hong Kong and Hollywood Film Industries

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Introduction

A wide array of scholars such as Theodor Adorno, Fredric Jameson, and Arjun Appadurai have claimed that commercial films convey powerful images with the capacity to change human relationships around the world and provide models for new self-identities (Jameson, 1998: 58, 62-3; Adorno, 1991: 103-4; Appadurai, 1996: 35-6). Extending these claims, I argue that it is necessary to examine the environments and networks of media production as we must query under what socio-cultural and political economic conditions these powerful and far-flung fantasies are created. To do so, I examine how national, cultural, and individual identities are formed through the process of commercial film production by looking at how media personnel such as actors, producers, assistant directors, and make-up artists work together within both the Hong Kong and Hollywood film industries. I link the notions of "border-crossing" and "blurring of boundaries" that frequently figure in the scholarship on Hong Kong films (and Hong Kong itself) to the type of creative and logistical work that all media personnel, in varying ways, must perform. Contemporary transnational film production industries are predicated on the notion of "flexible" media personnel, who can shift between markets, genres, citizenships, tasks, ideologies, and even personas (Appadurai, 1996: 40-1; Ong, 1999: 170; Storper and Christopherson, 1987: 113). As social scientists who have studied capitalist work sites have concluded, while engaging in the work of producing goods or performing services, new (and in some cases, fragmentary) identities and relationships are correspondingly formed (see Taussig, 1980; Ong, 1987, 1999; Kondo, 1990, 1997; Freeman, 2000; Yelvington, 1995; Lee 1998). In particular, anthropologist Dorinne Kondo attests, "[w]ork and personhood are inextricable from one another. In transforming the material world, my informants also transformed themselves." (Kondo, 1990: 48) These complex identities and relationships emanate partly from the way in which media personnel must (not?) switch between their self-perceived realities and the fantasy worlds that they are creating for the camera. Thus, I posit that there are uneven formations of national, socio-cultural, and personal boundaries manifesting at varying levels of perceived reality within commercial media production.

There is a rich body of film analysis, cultural studies, and comparative literature scholarship that reads Hong Kong films as texts that are inscribed with socio-cultural and ideological themes (see Abbas, 1997; Marchetti, 2000; Yau, 2001; Lo, 2001a; Fu, 2000; Chow, 1993). Taking the line of inquiry in another direction, anthropology of media production reads the creative and logistical work that goes into making films and television as texts that are also laden with socio-economic, cultural, and political narratives that reveal complex relationships and identity formation (see Abu-Lughod, 2005; Ginsburg, 1991; Turner, 2002; Dornfeld, 1998; Ganti, 2002; Mandel, 2002). Thus, I observe processes such as the political economic and ideological conditions under which media personnel traverse between different media

industries; the social dynamics that emerge during rehearsals and filming between actors, directors, and film crews; the cosmetic and wardrobe transformations that actors undergo and the logistical efforts to work within budgets. I will draw from ethnographic data collected in Hong Kong and Hollywood between January 2002 and September 2004. I engaged in participant observation on film sets and film production offices in both sites and conducted interviews with a range of media personnel.

I start by reviewing the relevant literature on the Hong Kong film industry. I then discuss how ethnographic studies of media production document ways in which ideological, cultural, and economic identities are forged, particularly in the case of British efforts to train formerly communist Kazakhstani media personnel in capitalist values and ventures through media production. I then turn to anthropologist Aihwa Ong's conceptualizations of the transnational movements of the Chinese entrepreneurial class in contemporary, late capitalism, and their strategies for "flexible citizenship." (Ong, 1999: 112-3) I explore the implications of an economic treaty between the film industries of Hong Kong and mainland China ("Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement") as a way to interpret "border-crossing" in an ideological context. I also draw from Ong's work on the cultural and political economic implications of transcending geo-political boundaries as a way to link a prevalent theme in scholarship on the relationship between the Hong Kong and Hollywood film industries -- that of "blending" and "border-crossing" -- with the process of identity formation that occurs in the work of film production. Ong's theorizing about "flexibility" serves as a stepping-stone to other anthropological accounts that explore how multiple forms of identity and selfhood are formed in the workplace, and how those conceptualizations can broaden our understanding of creative industries. I then draw from my ethnographic research in both Hong Kong and Hollywood to discuss some examples of "flexibility" and "border-crossings" on a personal level among actors and crew members that emerge out of the professional work of film production as a way to interpret media production as a cultural and political economic process.

Transnational Border-Crossings

Much of the interdisciplinary scholarship on the relationship between the Hollywood and Hong Kong film industries refers to "boundaries" and "border-crossings," with these terms spawning a range of books and conferences. [1] Hong Kong film, like Hong Kong itself, is seen as porous and provisional, historically incorporating themes and styles from mainland China, Japan, and Hollywood (see Fu, 2000; Yau, 2001; Lo, 2001a; Bordwell, 2001, 2000; Yueh-yu and Davis, 2002). Film personnel from mainland China and Japan have worked in the Hong Kong film industry over the past century; for instance, the influx of Shanghai émigrés in the late 1930s into the Hong Kong film industry resulted in a different dialect and a disavowal of Western influences in Hong Kong which influenced the cultural and ideological tone of the emerging Hong Kong film industry (Fu, 2000: 207).

A key theme in the contemporary literature on Hong Kong films -- its aesthetic and ideological dimensions -- as well as the movements of its personnel, and even Hong Kong itself, is that of "borders." A border represents the gap between different entities of a geo-political, social, economic, ideological, aesthetic, or cultural nature. The city of Hong Kong is frequently characterized by film and cultural studies scholars as a "floating," "marginal," and "hybrid" space, inundated by and encompassing multiple elements, indigenous and foreign (Abbas, 1997: 4; Marchetti, 2000: 292). Hong Kong is thus always a transitional, transformative, transnational (and transgressive?) space (see Abbas, 1997; Lo, 2001a, 2001b;

Marchetti, 2001, 2000; Fu, 2000; Chan, 2005). Since my focus is on media production, I am interested in how labor and capital move across such borders. The movements of capital and film personnel around the Pacific Rim, including Hollywood, have been examined to varying degrees (see Stokes and Hoover, 1999; Desser, 2000; Lo, 2001a, 2001b; Lii, 1998; Yueh-yu and Davis, 2002), tracing in particular Hong Kong cultural icons such as Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeoh, John Woo, Sammo Hung, Peter Chan, Jet Li, and Wo-Ping Yuen.

It should be noted that the impact of C.E.P.A. (Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement) upon the mobility of Hong Kong film personnel is yet to be fully determined. C.E.P.A. is a trade agreement between mainland China and its "Special Administrative Region" of Hong Kong that seeks to liberalize trade between the two markets. C.E.P.A. is being implemented in stages; currently, C.E.P.A. II stipulates that a Hong Kong/mainland China co-production must maintain a 50:50 ratio of mainland and Hong Kong creative and technical personnel, with the eventual aim under C.E.P.A. III that "principal personnel" from Hong Kong (such as leading actors, directors, and costume designers) should constitute more than 50%. C.E.P.A. II also requires that the film be shot in the mainland, and be approved by government censors (both of these conditions are expected to be modified over time). Most importantly for Hong Kong, these joint ventures will allow them to transcend the quota imposed on foreign films, thereby granting the Hong Kong media community greater access to a substantially larger market (Hong Kong Trade Development Council, February 8, 2006).

The "borders" that media personnel traverse in the work of film production are cultural, socio-economic, and geo-political. Examples of these types of gaps are found in ethnographies of media production. Anthropologists who have studied indigenous and commercial media production have written of film production as sites teeming with cultural and ideological tensions and whose socio-economics reflect the larger political economic context in which the particular media are produced (see Ginsburg, 1991; Abu-Lughod, 2005; Turner, 2002; Dornfeld, 1998; Ganti, 2002, 2004; Mandel, 2002). Borrowing terminology from research on the history of territorial and ideological colonization in Southern Africa, in examining media production we also discover how external cultural forces attempt to "colonize the consciousness" of local media personnel in complex interplays (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: 4).

In her article "A Marshall Plan of the Mind: The Political Economy of a Kazakh Soap Opera," anthropologist Ruth Mandel examines the process by which British soap opera writers and directors "taught" Kazakhstani media personnel how to model their burgeoning television serial industry upon the British one (Mandel, 2002: 214). In a program established by the Thatcher government in 1992, British media personnel were exported to former Soviet states in order to "teach capitalism to the communists." (Mandel, 2002: 213) Instructing the Kazakhstanis in how to make British-style soap operas functioned as a form of indoctrination of "democratic" and neo-liberal, free-market values. Off-camera behavior also merited refashioning: one of the features of the colonization of this fledgling Kazakhstani media industry includes the British media personnel modeling work ethics for the Kazakhstanis that they claimed promoted sobriety, honesty, and reliability. Additionally, the British writers strove to create storylines for the serial that would revolve around privately owned businesses, such as banks and medical clinics -- socio-economic institutions and practices that were largely unfamiliar to the Kazakhstanis. By structuring such storylines, the British government hoped to impart values of free trade, consumer capitalism, and "democracy" to Kazakhstani viewers, thereby crafting a new type of Kazakhstani citizen. [\[2\]](#)

"Multiculturalism" (in the form of intermarriage between Kazakhstanis and Russians) was another storyline that the British writers introduced. This move resulted in cultural tensions since local sentiments about such mixed unions were unfavorable (in an act of cultural contestation, after the British team returned to Great Britain, the Kazakhstani writers scripted divorce plots for these intermarriages). Although some of the Kazakhstani media personnel resisted some of the British attempts to discipline themselves, their media formats, and, ultimately, the Kazakhstani public, the television sound stages nevertheless became a battleground for Western, "democratic" values over local Kazakhstani and formerly Soviet ones. Other ethnographies of media production have also revealed how the messages that are fashioned for consumption are constructed amid (sometimes competing) cultural influences (see Abu-Lughod, 2005; Dornfeld, 1998; Ganti, 2002).

In tracking the transnational flows of media personnel and capital, how exactly do products, people, and ideas move across boundaries and over borders? To quote anthropologist Bill Maurer in his article querying the historicity of global movements of money, what, precisely, "counts as movement"? (Maurer, 2000: 672) In thinking beyond physical, material movement in a global age, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai posited that imagining oneself in a place different from where one is physically located counts as a form of movement, yet people have been dreaming of far-off places long before mass media enabled us to conceive of a particular locale different from the one we inhabit (Appadurai, 1996: 53-4). Since boundaries and borders must be granted historical specificity due to socio-cultural, political and economic contexts, it follows that the movements involved in crossing borders are also grounded in historical specificity.

In turning to anthropologist Aihwa Ong's work on the cultural politics of transnationalism, we can further explore how individuals within the contemporary Hong Kong film industry move across geo-political terrain. In her book *Flexible Citizenship*, Ong discusses the journeys of primarily Hong Kong and Taiwanese transnational business elites and their flows of capital across the "Pacific Shuttle" of Asia and the West Coast of the US (Ong, 1999: 127). She articulates her concept of "zones of graduated sovereignty": due to differing populations' specific relations to capital accumulation and their location within production sites, states establish variegated zones wherein those who can accumulate more capital for the state are afforded higher levels of political, legal, and financial acceptance and privilege, such as Chinese entrepreneurs and media personnel (Ong, 1999: 217, 160-3, 165, 168, 174). She stresses that state regimes try to *incorporate* those individuals with the ability to maximize global capital and national investment, yet *delimit* the entry of un-skilled laborers. In other words, the state is not a defunct entity; indeed, it functions as an instrument of, and instrumentalizes, global capital and global labor forces. This point complicates the notion of a "borderless world" that scholars across disciplines have referred to in the face of "globalization," (e.g. Yau, 2001: 2-3; Appadurai, 1996: 32-3, 42) a late capitalist phenomenon in which features of diverse localities collide and combine to become frequently shared experiences within a wide world. Hence borders, while re-aligning, remain pertinent as they regulate the terms by which classes of transnational labor forces move.

C.E.P.A. is one example of how national and regional borders are currently re-aligning in the service of capital accumulation. With the confrontation between different dialects and socio-economic practices in Hong Kong and mainland Chinese co-productions, including divergent ideas about appropriate story material and aesthetic styles, film and television co-productions also represent a site of complex cultural flows and processes. In some instances, film production ceases to be purely a cinematic venture between individuals; it also becomes an

encounter between emblems of diverse political and social histories. In an interview conducted in Hong Kong, a producer told me that Hong Kong "celebrity" actors are chosen for such co-productions partly to model how to behave in a certain way -- a way that comes, he claimed, from having lived in an "open society" such as Hong Kong (research interview, 2004). This modeling functions as a pedagogical tool for the benefit of the mainland actors, and, ultimately, for mainland audiences, and reinforces the notion of "boundaries." Other key creative personnel, such as the director and cinematographer, are also instrumental in imparting this "open" sensibility through their respective crafts. This "open society" that the producer refers to is founded largely in Anglo-American neo-liberal policies that promote "democratic" values such as free trade and consumerism, among others. Hong Kong "celebrity" actors who work in mainland China through this economic treaty are traversing borders between a nominally Communist country and a consumer-capitalist former colony, bringing their presumed cultural values with them. Thus, we see that ideology remains a potent force in the production processes of culture industries. Whether there are specifically "Chinese" cultural norms and business practices that resemble, build upon, or obscure Western ones in such settings is an area ripe for future research.

In another ethnographic application of Ong's notion of flexibility across geo-political terrain, aspiring filmmakers and actors from northern and western Europe use Hong Kong as a stepping-stone for film school education, film production, and acting jobs. I interviewed a filmmaker from Great Britain in Hong Kong who told me that her British citizenship afforded her the opportunity to easily pursue her training and filmmaking in Hong Kong, since its status as a former British colony results in relaxed entry for British citizens (research interview, 2004). Hollywood was her original choice of destination, but acquiring a visa to the US, particularly after 9/11, became increasingly difficult. Remaining in England was not a viable option for her as she felt that there was minimal financing for film ventures there. Thus, she can pursue her dream of making films, and in the process utilize the cheap labor available in Hong Kong's film industry (due to the absence of labor unions in Hong Kong, film crews and actors generally work more cheaply and for longer hours). She hopes to market her film at international film festivals and, through that avenue, eventually enter the Hollywood film industry. Thus, we see someone who is not an emblem of capital accumulation to the U.S. nevertheless utilize Hong Kong's relaxed labor conditions and residual privileging of British citizens as a gateway for her eventual entrance into Hollywood.

A Hong Kong Chinese actress I interviewed told me of her experiences working in both the Hong Kong and Hollywood media industries. Due to her husband's job in the US, she was able to acquire an American passport decades ago, and they have raised and educated their children in the US. This actress has been able to work in both industries as acting jobs have arisen (although there have been more opportunities in Hong Kong than in Hollywood). She told me that after being trained in acting in the US, and working various jobs in Hollywood, she carries her "American" standards of professionalism back to the Hong Kong film industry. For instance, she clarifies to Hong Kong film production companies that she expects to be paid "in full and on time," with no re-negotiations after her contract has expired (research interview, 2004). She considers such practices uniquely American, and at odds sometimes with the more casual and less bureaucratic Hong Kong film industry practices (see Stokes and Hoover, 1999: 25). Another media professional who also holds dual passports and works in both Hong Kong and Hollywood film industries told me that she is seeking to institute "American-style" professional associations for actors in Hong Kong, similar to those found in Hollywood (research interview, 2004). Thus, we see that importations of perceived

"American" models of professionalism can transform the socio-economic landscape of the Hong Kong film and television industries. [3]

There are many film and television personnel in Hong Kong who have been raised, trained, and have worked in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the US. Some have attended elite English-language schools within Hong Kong. As residents of a former British colony with family ties rooted in mainland China, personnel such as these have become linguistically, occupationally, and, arguably, ideologically "flexible;" indeed many Hong Kong Chinese media personnel have described themselves to me as "flexible" and as a "bridge between East and West." These personnel can tap into different cultural and national registers in different production sites, at times calling into play their "Western" identities (such as English language fluency, an English moniker, conversational references to their time in the West and ties to Western institutions, and, in some cases, conversion to Christianity). Other times, they enact pan-Chinese identities: proficient in Mandarin, Cantonese and sometimes a regional dialect, invoking allegiance and ancestral ties to regions of mainland China, and familiarity with Chinese religious rituals and superstitions). Further study will reveal how these various cultural flows may affect the production process, and in particular, illuminate the ways in which local and overseas Chinese negotiate varying cultural understandings of art, time-discipline, and finance.

Personal Border-Crossings

Ong's notion of "flexibility" also helps us to think through the idea of "border-crossings" on personal and individual levels, such as how actors traverse between performing a scripted character and enacting their own self-perceived identity. I have discussed with actors whether the emotional content of what they perform seeps into their own life, and how their real and "reel" personas become intertwined. One actress told me:

[T]he character was something I created, I would put this mantle on, do my work, then take this mantle off and go home. But, as I've been working I feel that actually more of me has seeped into the character, or more of the character has seeped into me. So it just becomes a *blend*. (research interview, 2003, my italics)

As this actress indicates by referring to seepage and "blending," borders at the personal level are hazy and fluid, permeable to external forces and energies, and at times unable to contain the essence of "the self" that Euro-American notions of selfhood promulgate. Anthropologist Dorinne Kondo offers a culturally informed critique of this notion of the "core" self: "The English language encourages an assumption that 'the self' is a whole, bounded subject who marches through untouched and unchanged from one situation to the next." (Kondo, 1990: 32) In her ethnography of a family-owned Japanese factory, Kondo draws from the conventions of Japanese linguistics as well as Indian and Japanese cultural notions of selfhood to de-stabilize the idea of the self as unitary and static. Instead, Kondo argues that a person's self is relational and "permeable" -- and thus, "flexible" -- arising out of varying social and familial contexts and power relations (Kondo, 1990: 26). "Boundaries between self and other are fluid and constantly changing, depending on context and on the social positioning people adopt in particular situations." (Kondo, 1990: 31) Kondo also points to cultural distinctions between internality and externality, and challenges the Western notion of a strict boundary between an individual and the world "out there." (Kondo, 1990: 22, 35) As the film personnel I spoke with attested, the everyday work of creating illusions troubles the

divide between self and world/society and "reality" and "fantasy." Many of them -- actors, assistant directors, make-up artists, and camera operators, among others -- also experienced a sort of "blurring" between themselves and others on film sets, allowing for a less abstract way of theorizing "flexibility" and "borders" in media production.

The film set is a site seething with energies -- aesthetic, technological, financial -- that are at times in tension with one another. The material and symbolic significance of the gaze of the camera threatens to disrupt the conventional and unitary sense of "reality" for those in its vicinity. As Kaja Silverman notes, the work that occurs around the camera is a "complex field of relations" (Silverman, 1996: 136). Some actors commented on the potentially sinister transformative power of the camera -- its capacity to distort their self-perceived reality. Specifically, what is at stake for actors: in enacting an altered reality day after day, job after job, do aspects of "reality" for the actor-as-person become lost, and if so, what, if anything, is gained in the process? An actor who was playing the role of a woman recently widowed told me:

[T]he thing is, when you are an actor and you are working in an intense [filming] situation, you make yourself really vulnerable, you expose yourself so much that I believe that there are all sorts of energies you draw into yourself without realizing you are. And it's hard, because at the end of the day, you're crying and everything, and they yell "wrap," and [it's] time to go home, and you've got to be someone else. (research interview, 2003)

Not only is this actress confused by her attempts to retain boundaries between herself and her character, but her sense of "self" is in question as well. She further spoke of her identity as a fractured entity, splintering off into several directions. Akin to Ong's "flexible citizens," perhaps actors consciously and strategically choose which persona they will enact; the risk may come when they feel they are not able to manage how their identity is forming, which self they are inhabiting. This risk also affects those that work with them. Method acting requires the actor to seek provocation for producing a certain mood -- for instance, anger -- even while the cameras are not rolling. Media personnel have spoken of the sometimes tense environments on film sets when actors engage in Method acting, leaving those who assist the production not knowing whom exactly they are dealing with, and afraid to approach the actors for fear of an outburst (research interviews, 2003).

In considering what is at stake for actors, it must be understood that they take risks of an emotional, social, and spiritual nature, among others. In addition to the confusion that they feel in tacking back and forth between self-perceived reality and fantasy, the range of emotions in which many actors deeply immerse themselves is marked by extremes, and sometimes leaves them feeling vulnerable, at times even frightened by the unclear boundaries. Many Hollywood and Hong Kong film plots are structured around a romantic or sexualized storyline as well as violent scenes of death and dying that do not leave film personnel untouched. One actress spoke to me of her inability to "let go" of the malevolent character she was portraying, and her feeling that she was "possessed." Another actor complained of being emotionally drained by performing the emotion of grief day after day and his desire to complete the film and "leave these feelings behind." (research interview, 2002) Submerging oneself in emotional turmoil can lead to the inability to contain one's feelings. While I was observing one actress film a scene in which she refers to her dead husband the director had to halt production because the actress could not control her tears while filming the scene, and proceeded to cry off camera for the next half-hour. Later she told

me that that scene triggered "real life" fears about mortality that had been lying dormant (research interview, 2003).

Yet, some actors see performance as an opportunity to escape from their self-perceived reality. One actress in Hong Kong told me how acting allows her to indulge her desire to inhabit identities different than her own: "I am born a certain level. But one day I can play a queen, the next, a poor person. I don't choose my family members, where I was born into, but I can choose what roles I play." (research interview, 2004) Professional performance in this instance brings a form of agency, allowing film personnel to transcend scripted and unscripted social, economic, or cultural categories and constraints. Yet engaging in "temporary illusions" and enjoying a reprieve from "the strictures of day-to-day reality" can throw pre-existing socio-economic relations into disarray (Seizer, 2000: 227).

Transgressing socially and culturally established class locations and kinship relations is another facet of what is at stake (and at the same time what can be so enticing) for actors -- both on stage and off. As anthropologist Susan Seizer points out regarding her fieldwork conducted among Tamil stage actresses in India, members of the Hindu public have expressed outrage when a member of a low caste portrays someone born into a high caste, even though the switch may be personally liberating for the actress in question. Seizer also comments on the stigma of performing what is considered "private" emotions in public spaces for actresses, such as the experience of falling in love, and how such open portrayals threatened to disrupt prevailing socio-cultural gender norms (Seizer, 2000: 231-3). On Hollywood and Hong Kong film sets, boundaries between reality and fantasy are also confounded when actors simulate familial relations for storylines.

Off-stage, Seizer also notes how the social and emotional intimacies formed with other actresses and actors as they traveled around to various performance locations within India constituted fictive kin networks, further subverting the society's notion of "real" family relations and caste divisions (Seizer, 2000: 234). Similarly, off-camera social relations lead to what many personnel refer to as "family" relations (research interviews, 2004). Filmmaking is a time-consuming process, and many film workers sometimes travel to distant locations together. In general, creating characters and settings requires collaborative imagining, as well as great levels of trust. Rarely do actors work in isolation; in fact, film sets are usually very social settings. In her research on the Bollywood film industry, anthropologist Tejaswini Ganti has examined the ties between the religiously diverse Bollywood film personnel, which include Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Inter-marriage has occurred across religious, ethnic, linguistic, and caste divisions among Hindi film personnel (Ganti, 2004: 92), illustrating the socio-cultural boundaries that become blurred in the work of film production. [\[4\]](#)

It should be emphasized that it is not only actors who feel this blurring between themselves and others and who enact multiple identities; media crew such as assistant directors, make-up artists, and camera operators also experience a sense of fluid identity and selfhood. In many situations, people imitate the behavior of others, consciously or unconsciously. But perhaps working in an environment of professionalized artifice and performance particularly invites mimicry on the part of its personnel, rendering professional social relationships "excessively mobile." (Seizer, 2000: 234) An assistant director in Hollywood told me that he finds himself taking on the personality of whichever director he is currently working under for the duration of filming. "When I work with X, who is happy and easygoing, I act the same way [as him]. When I work with Y, who's yelling a lot, I am [also] short-tempered and I yell a lot in traffic

on my drive home." (research interview, 2003) The line between where his sense of "self" ends and others' begins evaporates over time, especially since he may feel that the persona of the director with whom he works has also "seeped" into his sense of self, and thus he interacts in a similar register. In another instance, a make-up artist told me that because the Hollywood film industry (and more specifically, the work space of film sets) is popularly known as being tolerant of alternative sexualities, she felt comfortable openly displaying her bi-sexuality on film sets (research interview, 2003). I noticed that other film personnel were also sexually fluid, opting sometimes to appear socially feminine, at others socially masculine. This type of sexual ambiguity and openness among industry workers is in contrast to the heterosexist and unambiguous female and male sexualities usually depicted in Hollywood films. It is possible that the public perception of sexual diversity in creative industries does indeed evoke this fluid behavior on the part of its personnel, as the make-up artist suggested. Yet it is also possible that being constantly immersed in an atmosphere of heightened performance also unleashes the enactment of alternate sexualities, fantasies, and personas.

The industrial organization of the workplace may also encourage such "flexibility" and permeability of identities. In the de-centralized, post-Fordist mode of production dominant in both Hollywood and Hong Kong starting in the 1970s, media personnel move frequently from production company to production company, project to project, and film set to film set, as is common with short-term contract employment (Christopherson and Storper, 1989: 334). In addition to having to continually adjust to new supervisors and co-workers, many media personnel are forced to quickly immerse themselves into grueling emotional film themes and settings, or historical time periods, and then pull themselves out of such settings. Straddling the demands of high job turn-over and deep immersion into intense subject matter may also lead to de-centered and fluid conceptualizations of self and identity.

Crew members, such as make-up artists, camera operators, assistant directors, and set designers, who work to create an illusory atmosphere are, like actors, also at risk of being haunted by the potent themes within scripted material. Retaining a firm boundary between fantasy and "reality" is necessary in order to conduct their work, yet some personnel I have spoken with are aware of how tenuous at times that gap can be. One make-up artist told me of her distaste at turning an actor into a disfigured and diseased person. While studying medical textbooks for visual information on how to create this façade, she was overcome at how "real people" are afflicted by such conditions, and how, while at the end of the day she can transform the actor back to his/her "real" appearance, she was haunted by the fact that there are people for whom such conditions are not merely cosmetic (research interview, 2003). Dwelling in that liminal space between "fantasy" and "reality" -- the moment of transformation -- is an eerie experience, and one that threatens to disrupt the self-perceived stability of "reality."

Spiritual matters are also at stake for everyone involved in a film production -- actors and crew members. Dangerous scenes are filmed, violent stories are enacted; real-life accidents can, and do, happen on sets. Some actors and stunt workers perform personal rituals before they play a scene in which they die or commit a violent act to ward off bad luck. Wearing a talisman under clothing as a safeguard to protect oneself from the dangerous themes in the scripted material is not uncommon. On some film sets in Hong Kong, when scenes of violence are filmed, members of the production engage in "*bai sun*," a ritual in which incense is lit at the altar of a Daoist god as a form of protection against spirit possession, and gods and ghosts are appeased. This tradition is based on Buddhist, Daoist and local Chinese religious practices (Kwong, 2002: 68-72); propitiations to the Gods of Carpentry and

Performers are rooted in Cantonese Opera theatre traditions. Drawing from a different religious tradition (one that traveled in tandem with the colonialist project), I have also heard Hong Kong film personnel who describe themselves as Christians refer to God and their faith when discussing their goals, their visions, and their practices.

Even the logistics and financing that comprise "movie magic" are also couched in superstitions, which constitute apparently "rational" business decisions for many media personnel. One Hollywood executive producer who ticked off the various "rational" industrial practices he employs for commercial production (such as market research, polling, and the use of credentialized experts) surprised me when he matter-of-factly added to his list his decision to hire a shaman to bless his production with success and protection (research interview, 2003). He said, "It can't hurt, if you know what I mean," and rolled his eyes skywards, implying that a force higher than him possessed the power to deflect disasters. That there was no apparent contradiction for him between "rational" business practices and a spiritual means of implementing them illustrates the agility with which he shuttles between historically bounded realms of the sacred and the profane. Other efforts to gain profits in the risk-laden venture that filmmaking comprises also call for non-secular methods. Several personnel mentioned that a Hollywood studio had for years kept an astrologer on its payroll, using her predictions to decide the timing of film premieres, such as *Star Wars: Episode IV -- A New Hope* (1977). Visits to psychics in both Hong Kong and Hollywood by media personnel who reassure me that they are not "normally" superstitious are also not uncommon. Thus, we see that the everyday practices of film production are indeed located at a gap between worlds -- fantastical and real, symbolic and material -- and that traversing such liminal spaces obfuscates coherent and consistent identity formations.

Conclusion

It is imperative to interrogate the material and ideological conditions that underpin the sites of fantasy creation, for many of the powerful and pervasive fantasies that emerge from these urban sites are deployed, re-worked, and resisted by people all over the world (Jameson, 2001: 62-3; Appadurai, 1996: 53). I have argued that the process of making films also creates national, socio-cultural, and personal identities for media personnel as well, albeit in uneven and inconsistent ways. I have tried to create a link between the theme of crossing borders that is continually re-configuring in the literature on the Hong Kong film industry to flexible forms of identity among film personnel in the Hong Kong and Hollywood film industries. Ontological issues are also at play in media production, which confound even those who are engaged in the daily work of creating illusions. Unclear and discontinuous conceptualizations of "reality" and "fantasy" intersect with cultural understandings of selfhood, and relationships between the external world and internality. Analyzing the differing types of work and identity formation that go into making films that are viewed by audiences all over the world can help us understand the cultural processes by which media messages are created.

Flexible identity formation and performance are characteristics of human behavior that are certainly not limited to the world of film production. However, film production sites offer a powerful example of encounters between cultural performances and processes and ideologies. Specific questions include: when a Hong Kong film is funded by mainland Chinese financing, are the flows of money the sole influence from the mainland on the production? How might the organization of film budgets and labor contracts differ between Hong Kong, mainland China, and Hollywood, and how might such differences or similarities reflect varying cultural attitudes towards law, money, and business practices? How might the Hong

Kong film industry's labor practices be impacted by the expectations and experiences of overseas Chinese who come to work in Hong Kong? These questions merit further study, especially in light of how the film products of Hong Kong and Hollywood are among the most pervasive and prominent exports of Hong Kong, S.A.R. and the United States, and both production sites have radically different historical relationships to mainland China.

In a final reflection, it is of interest to note that both Hollywood and Hong Kong boast an "Avenue of the Stars" -- monuments to the icons of their respective film industries that serve as popular tourist spots. [5] Both of these Avenues remind visitors, especially those from other regions, that these celebrities remain rooted in some way in the cities of Los Angeles and Hong Kong, and emblematic of the dreams that those cities inspire. As the actual, embodied "stars" make their journeys across time and space, transcending borders and boundaries, some part of their essence has been captured in cement as a tribute to their ability to generate powerful imageries and enormous amounts of revenue, and as a celebration of their moorings in a transnational world.

Notes

[1] For instance, Esther C. M. Yau's edited volume *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*, and the 2004 Fulbright Symposium at Hong Kong University, titled "Hong Kong/Hollywood at the Borders".

[2] See Purnima Mankekar's ethnography *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), for an example of local media personnel who impart Western, "modern" values to their audiences through soap operas with storylines about the virtues of hygiene, Western scientific values, and family planning as a way to craft "modern," Westernized citizens.

[3] Hong Kong's film industry is, of course, not always on the receiving end of such transformations; numerous Hong Kong media personnel who work in the action genre, specifically martial arts, have also had a large impact on American film production practices and genres.

[4] While Hollywood and Hong Kong's film industries may not be as heterogeneous as Bollywood's, the mix of local Chinese religious traditions and Christianity in Hong Kong and Judao-Christian traditions and New Age religions in Hollywood would be an exciting topic for a future study of the relation between art, spirituality, and commercial media.

[5] Since the Hong Kong Avenue of the Stars is a recently erected monument, many of the older stars, such as Bruce Lee, do not have their handprints or signatures written into the cement. But their names on the pavement mark their presence.

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