

# Life-Times of Disposability within Global Neoliberalism

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A number of scholarly works focused on the political and economic transformations known as globalization have described the perceived shift from liberalism to neoliberalism concomitant with these transformations in terms of a shift in the logic of constitution of forms of personhood and governmentality from one constructed around rights and property to another constructed around risk and security. Beyond the domains of political and economic practice and rationality, this identified shift in global hegemony is seen to produce and issue out of changed structures of lived subjectivities and feeling and transformed modalities of social experience and imagination. In this essay, I want to explore in particular the structurings of time in emerging orders of labor and life as a way of understanding certain cultural and philosophical aspects of the project of neoliberalism and the organized divisions and relations among geopolitical populations and their social lifeworlds, which comprise and are presupposed by this new global hegemonic order.

Seen in light of broad changes in a shared regional and global political economy, films from China and the Philippines—in particular, Jia Zhangke’s *Still Life* (2006) and *24 City* (2008) and Brillante Mendoza’s *Tirador* (2007) and *Lola* (2009)—are important touchstones for my thinking on this subject. As a spectacular commodity, cinema is not only a principal medium of what Debord calls the “time of the spectacle”—“in the narrow sense, as the time appropriate to the consumption of images, and in the broadest sense, as the image of the consumption of time”—it is also a principal and perhaps paradigmatic medium of the processes of idealization and abstraction that comprise the independent being of value

on which financialization, or, let's say, the time of speculation, depends.<sup>1</sup> That said, I do not see these films as simply instances of capitalist media, though they are undoubtedly that, and it is in this aspect that they can be seen as exemplary sites for understanding the transformations wrought by and comprising neoliberalist financialization. I also see them as aesthetic forms, experiments in sensorial perception related to located and bounded forms of being and ways of life that may be subsumed by capital but are neither reducible to nor fully exhausted by capitalist forms. It is in this aspect that these films in particular, which seek to unfold the times of disposable people (in the contexts of economic reforms in China and elite democratic structural adjustment in the Philippines), make sensible ways of being and living, forms of personhood and cooperation, improvisatory and experimental arrangements of social life, remaindered within the enlarged production time of capital.

In his series of lectures published as *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008), Michel Foucault describes American neoliberalism in terms of an extension of classic economic analysis to the undertheorized domain of labor, now to be viewed as an active economic subject through a theory of human capital, and the generalization of the economic form of the market to domains of social phenomena hitherto considered noneconomic. In neoliberalism, instead of being a partner in exchange, *homo economicus* is normatively understood as “an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself . . . being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer.”<sup>2</sup> All the activities and time spent on the formation of a child as a kind of capital-ability machine—and Foucault gives the example not only of educational activities but also the time parents devote to the child outside of educational activities, including “the simple time” spent feeding them and giving them affection—such activities and time spent (in what an older vocabulary would have identified as the time of “reproduction”) constitute practices of investment that are expected to yield future returns. This conception of labor as human capital that can be augmented through investment of presumably already-valued time (and indeed, the conception of the subject of labor or the worker as the entrepreneur of himself) is precisely the effect of the generalization of the “enterprise” form throughout the social body. “The generalization of the economic form of the market beyond monetary exchanges,” Foucault argues, “functions in American neo-liberalism as a principle of intelligibility and a principle of decipherment of social relationships and individual behavior.”<sup>3</sup>

Others have similarly commented on the generalization of a market rationality to all spheres of human life as the defining feature of neoliberalism. Following Foucault, Wendy Brown observes in the current US context, the rise of a normative political rationality entailing “the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action,

conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a microeconomic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality.<sup>24</sup> Randy Martin, expanding a similar analysis beyond Brown's argument, argues that as financial reason overtakes a system-based moral and political economy, the figure of the investor elbows out the consumer-citizen as the new normative focus of government policy. Leverage takes precedence over ownership and fixed benefits, and risk becomes somatized as a way of being, made into a subjectivity shaped by the specific logic of finance, less an entrepreneur than an arbitrageur, preying on fluctuations of price and making wagers on uncertainties made into potential risk opportunities for profitable returns.<sup>5</sup>

If financial reason has moved into the person, becoming a practical form of life, the time frame of its philosophy, whereby the future is already seen as the present, shapes and defines the new temporal protocols and conditions of lived life. On this view, Jane Guyer's analysis of a temporal shift in US public culture, marked by a double movement of evacuation of the near past and the near future in the discourses of macroeconomics and evangelical Christianity, corresponds to Martin's analysis of the time frame of experience of the investor self, who has "already been dispossessed of a secure past, present, and future." For this self, the new financial plan for living requires a daily investment, assessment, and management of one's contributions "to occupy the kind of time and space once readily conferred on personhood."<sup>6</sup> The temporality of defined benefits, wherein the futurity of the Protestant ethic promised a final settling of one's life accounts, is now overtaken by that of defined contributions, wherein one's mettle has to be proven one day at a time, and everyday becomes judgment day.

But what is the social distribution of this order? Which individuals inhabit and qualify for the investor model of subjectivity and its structure of temporal experience? For Martin, there is a racialized cleavage within society between the risk-takers, or risk-capable, and "those unable to live by risk, [who] are considered 'at risk.'" Such a cleavage is not a problem for neoliberalism, Maurizio Lazzarato argues in an elaboration of Foucault's theory of neoliberalism, insofar as it is precisely the conditions of inequality and insecurity—as "normalities"—that need to be ensured and calibrated for the operation of competition and enterprise as organizing principles of society. What neoliberalism worries about, rather, are the conditions preventing the individual, or, I would say, potential players (as defined on a variety of scales), from playing the game of competition. Hence, it seeks to establish an acceptable equilibrium between these normalities by defining "a threshold, a vital minimum, above which the individual can become an 'enterprise' and below which he/she falls out of the game and needs punctual rather than systematic state assistance."<sup>7</sup>

Such a threshold draws a line between the subjects and nonsubjects of a neoliberal regime of governmentality and political rationality. It would be difficult to map this distinction onto the older division between capital and labor insofar as it is precisely the subjectification of labor (in part prepared by the compromise between liberalism and labor, or the particular form of liberalism in the United States as “the antidote to socialism,” enabled by US economic expansion beyond its borders in the first half of the twentieth century)<sup>8</sup> that serves as the basis for labor’s conversion into “human capital.” It is nevertheless a distinction that remains indissociable from the social logics of capital accumulation. The threshold for valorizable entrepreneurial subjectivity does not only mark a division between levels and dynamics of operation of neoliberalism’s normative ideals and processes (e.g., between its effects on morally elevated risk-capable individuals and on morally denigrated, racialized, gendered, and sexualized “at risk” groups);<sup>9</sup> it also serves as a threshold of theoretical intelligibility and attention that implicates political-intellectual critique in the reinscription of the very institutions and processes that it might seek to radically transform.

There are several points of argument related to this threshold that I need to work through in order to provide a global framework for thinking about what I call remaindered life-times and in this way to consider other sites of making and political possibility subsumed within but also tangential to the global order of neoliberalism and its protocols for everyday life.

The first point is that if we see the distinction between “risk capable” subjects and “at risk” populations as a distinction between money for exchange and money for credit (i.e., money as capital), we are able to understand the differences between forms of personhood and lived experience that obtain under neoliberal norms not simply as spatially distributed social differences (given racialized, gendered, and/or sexualized forms of identity or geopolitical areas/populations), in a static framework of contradiction, but rather as moments or aspects of a global dynamic of processes of accumulation set in motion, in which practices of life-making play diverse, conflicting roles as ever-diminishing resources and ever-displaced limits in the production of value. It is within the circuit of money advanced as credit that we witness the temporality of finance, or the time of speculation, that shapes the form and experience of the neoliberal *homo economicus*. As Melinda Cooper shows, M-C-M’ is the movement of money as capital “where time no longer mediates the exchange of use-values, but enters, as it were, into ‘private relations’ with itself.”<sup>10</sup> The practice of speculation, as an investment of capital, involves an anticipatory time of realization of value in excess of the present value for which it is exchanged. “In return of value to value, capital speculates on its own future realization as something in excess of itself.”<sup>11</sup> It is precisely in its capacity

to continue exceeding itself, unhampered by the limits of the organic life of labor, or what used to be called the time of labor's reproduction, that the seeming "limitlessness" of capital's movement (and the endlessness of wars of security) lies. As Cooper writes, the speculative animation of value establishes "an inversion of powers between past and future, production and profit, in which the after-life of a life that has not yet been lived, the purely speculative existence of a future profit, realizes and gives birth to the past of production," a case of male parthenogenesis or self-birthing (son conceiving the father).<sup>12</sup>

The contraction of past and future, the evaporation of chronology or successive and cumulative time in the infinite extension of present action, the colonization of the future as a means of present realization, such temporal features of life under neoliberalism are, in my understanding, an accounting of the subjective experience of a subject inhabiting money as capital. Or put differently, it is at the level of the operation of money as capital (and the transformation of citizen-subjects into human capital) that much discussion of neoliberal political rationality, including Foucault's, takes place. Such an analysis of neoliberalism becomes thereby confined to the terms of the most "advanced" form of capitalism (postindustrial financialization), eliding an entire arena of production processes mistakenly presumed to have been superseded by it in the purported transformation of the regime of accumulation "from managerial/industrial capitalism to shareholding/postindustrial capitalism."<sup>13</sup> I am speaking, in part, of precisely that circuit of money as payment or exchange, which dead-ends in consumption, as another sphere of lived subjectivities and "labor" that while lying beyond the threshold of neoliberal intelligibility nevertheless plays an indispensable role in the broader *global* economy over which and through which finance capital has gained sovereign power.

Beyond the moment of simple reproduction, within which the "free" work of slaves, colonial peoples, and subordinate women served to augment the surplus labor-time expropriated from labor through formal processes of capitalist exchange, I am also speaking of the arena of not only this kind of hidden *labor-time* in the reproduction of the worker but also forms of remaindered *life-times*, the time of social reproduction that lies beyond contemporary modes of exploitation of life as living labor. Such life-times consist of a diverse array of acts, capacities, associations, aspirations in practice, experiential modes, and sensibilities that people engage in, draw upon, and invent in the struggle to make and remake social life under conditions of their own superfluity or disposability.

If the distinction between economic forms allows us to recognize that it is money as capital rather than simply "the market" or "enterprise" that serves as the key principle of subjectivation under neoliberalism, then it

is important to recognize, and this is my second point, that such subjects include states, corporations, emergent sectors of elite classes in developing countries, and not merely individuals. The distinction thereby helps us to understand the differences and relations between the effects of neoliberalist structures and institutions at the level of subjects in the global North and the global South and their permutations at the level of social reproductive labor, by which I mean devalued naturalized practices of maintaining minimal “organic” or subsistence life (including its historically variable, nonbiological entailments). Such labor is not simply equivalent to particular sectors of the economy such as domestic and service workers or peasant farmers who produce and subsidize the services and goods that maintain the minimal life or necessary consumption of human capital. This is rather a whole array of nonsubjectified labor that arguably produces both the personal “free time” or valued and value-productive “surplus time” used for investment in human capital, which includes the saved time for the consumption of the image and the savings that become a fiscal resource for defined contributions and investments in the financial market.

The distinction also allows us to take stock of modalities of being as activities of living that come to be expended and disposed of, as the very medium of financialization. Such disposable life constitutes precisely the displaced middle term of  $M-C-M'$ , the commodity that is merely the medium for the speculative genesis of value. While analyses of neoliberalism tend to be focused on the remaking of subjects under its new protocols of life, swathes of other life are merely viewed as the expended, surplused populations figured as forms of bare life, at-risk populations, warehoused, disposable people, urban excess (planet of the slums), out of which is to be gleaned new political subjects and potentials for resistance already convertible to the ruling political currencies of the day. It is of less interest to dwell on modes of life lived and practices of living that are remaindered in the process of production of biopolitical life, that is, both the waste of life and wasted life, what is not consumed in the consumption of life forces as the basis of the expropriation of value.

Lastly, even as these times of remaindered life have been the focus of attention of a range of contemporary Philippine and Chinese cinema, which have made their way into the global cultural market sphere of international cinema, we cannot understand the political import of this aesthetic attention, particularly the significance of their respective modalities of temporalization in relation to the project of neoliberalism, without a grasp of the latter’s global and regional dynamics, including the arenas of peripheral social life that US- and EU-focused critiques of neoliberalism as global hegemonic rationality tend to occlude or at best ignore. A view of these peripheral arenas brings into focus the connections among land, people, and time comprising the less-considered dynamics of neoliberalism.

## Land, People, Time

Given the terms of biopower in the contemporary centers of global capitalism (preoccupied with the institutions of governmentality over all social life subsumed by capital, with social death marking that threshold below which certain forms of human life fall out of the game), it is no surprise to find that, as Cooper writes, “what thereby disappears almost from Foucault’s field of vision is the question of land appropriation itself, in its relation both to the productivity of ‘life’—in all its guises, economic, sexual, biological—and the problematic of security.”<sup>14</sup> The question of land appropriation signals those processes of dispossession and direct appropriation necessary for the expanded (or enlarged) reproduction of capital, processes of “primitive accumulation” which depend on the territorial international order of sovereign nation-states established through European imperialism.

Usefully drawing on Carl Schmitt’s genealogy of international law, *The Nomos of the Earth*, to address the missing geopolitical dimension in Foucault’s understanding of classical liberalism as the animating ethos of biopower, Cooper argues that the liberal doctrine of freedom (and its polemics against the sovereign power of the state) is inconceivable and inoperable without the “forcibly open horizon of free space” of the colonial world serving as both the geographical context of liberalism’s utopia of incessant economic growth and an actual territorial zone of exception for the constitutive displacement of sovereign Europe’s domestic conflicts.<sup>15</sup> In the same manner, understood as an extreme extension of classical liberal economics, the neoliberal politics of the “Washington Consensus” must be seen as predicated on the “free spaces” of liberalized unilateral trade and deregulated national financial markets secured in the developing world through structural adjustment policies from the mid-1980s on. Just as the New World constituted a zone for the exonerated interstate and internal friction in the European states by exporting conflicts elsewhere, the postcolonial developing world has enabled the exonerated of the US domestic economic crisis of the early 1970s by serving as the zone of expanding financial risk for speculative capital: “the ‘free space’ represented by the New World in the era of European imperialism has here been overwritten—not superseded—by the zones of ‘free speculative movement’ forcibly opened up by the so-called Washington consensus.”<sup>16</sup> While in the previous imperialist era the zone of exception deployed by sovereign European states (as a constitutive condition of classical liberalism) was geographical in nature, in the contemporary global era the “open horizon” for risk-taking economic freedom bears a characteristically temporal dimension. Value-productive risks are located in “the virtual time zone of speculative maneuvers” and in place of a geographical state-of-exception,

“an ever-present state-of-emergency” is deployed by sovereign state powers as an instrument for guaranteeing the fundamental economic insecurity of the “free space” of deregulated flows.<sup>17</sup> That is to say, neoliberalism’s market and financial freedoms continue to depend on the geopolitical territorial order consolidated through imperialism to both establish and police those zones of open horizon for untrammelled speculative movement, zones which are no longer merely geographical but also temporal.

The question of land appropriation cannot, however, be confined to the era of classical liberalism but in fact persists as a crucial though overlooked condition of the global project of neoliberalism. As the process of “primitive accumulation” that must recur for the expanded reproduction of capital beyond the limits reached in a prior cycle (inducing “crisis”), the severance of people from their means of subsistence and their transformation into “free” and “unattached” wage laborers has as its basis “the expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil.”<sup>18</sup> Land appropriation does not only undergird the “boom” cycles of economic growth in Asia through the transformation of land into capital (providing new sites of financial investment in commercial and residential real estate, public works, and construction). As the case of China spectacularly demonstrates, the conversion of rural land into capital through privatization and marketization/industrialization also creates a newly “freed” proletariat for export-oriented manufacturing and agricultural industries, which in turn fuel debt-financed consumption in the postindustrial North.<sup>19</sup> Prior to 1978, three-quarters of the population in China was rural and mostly engaged in local agricultural production. By the early 1990s, nearly 120 million of these rural workers were employed in off-farm, township, and village enterprises.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond these familiar “real economy” implications of “primitive accumulation,” the question of land highlights a crucial phenomenal shift and condition of neoliberalist financialization: the important role of the violent “surplussing” of populations by their governments and other ruling national (economic) agents in the postcolonial and postsocialist global South as part and parcel of the latter’s respective bids (as neoliberal investor-subjects) to play the global market. That is to say, in order for national developing states and economic elites to become viable players in the financialized global market, they must have *at their disposal* a population that can be made redundant to any particular lines of industry as dictated by the sudden vicissitudes of capital flows and that will ultimately shoulder the costs of fallout of any and all speculative maneuvers. Such surplus populations of sovereign states (i.e., as “citizens” — really, nationals — subject to the regulations and controls of particular nation-states but effectively reduced to the status of nonsubjects, dispossessed of their rights to national commons and claims to their sovereign state) thus serve as securitized

assets for the risk-taking ventures of proper investor subjects.<sup>21</sup> In other words, these investor subjects do not require the dispossessing processes of “primitive accumulation” solely for the creation of a new waged labor force, or for that matter a labor reserve army. They require processes of dispossession to create and maintain a population of “surplused” people as monetized aggregates of disposable life. Monetized, surplus human life can serve not only as flexible labor, readily available and eliminable as capital moves from one site (or one line) to another, in effect enabling the speed of capital circulation and minimizing losses to capital in downturns, crashes, and crises; this disposable life can also serve as *risk-absorbing collateral*, particularly for state and state-allied enterprises, which can offer it bundled as wholesale life commodities promising future life-times of surplus labor and money (in the form of taxes) — value — that can be *advanced*, that is, cashed in *now* (through “cuts” in the national budget, social services, and so on, currency devaluation, to service bad debts, as exemplified in the bank bailouts in the aftermath of the US subprime mortgage crisis and in the austerity programs now being installed in Europe).<sup>22</sup>

In this context, land continues to serve as an important means of production from which rural populations are continually dispossessed even as it remains a “flexible” and supplementary means of subsistence for those newly “freed” and increasingly surplused people. Indeed, against the widely shared notion of the increasing if not complete obsolescence of the peasant as a historical category, Silvia Federici argues for the continuing importance of agricultural work in today’s political economy, not only because of its size as a productive sector (employing about two billion people globally) and evidenced by the World Bank’s recent prioritization of agrarian reform in its restructuring programs but also because subsistence agriculture in particular underwrites the social reproduction of “the millions who would otherwise have no means to purchase food on the market.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, land signals not only the overlooked processes of “primitive accumulation” within global neoliberalism but also the overlooked processes of social reproduction of surplus (not just directly productive) life.<sup>24</sup> As the work of indigenous scholars, for example, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui’s *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (2008) and Andrea Smith’s *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005), has long demonstrated, land continues to be an absolutely vital issue for the survival and future of communities destined for disappearance.

As both the consequence and medium of finance-led modes of value production, disposable populations are produced and maintained precisely through the instrumental use and control of land (as capital and as sovereign territory). Surplus people are maintained as surplus through processes that alternately and simultaneously “free” them from the land

and tether them to it. For example, as Federici points out, a process of “re-peasantization” is occurring alongside the processes of proletarianization and urbanization in China, as rural migrant workers in the coastal cities are forced by downturns in economic growth to return to the countryside and to constantly move between rural and urban work sites. Deprived of equal access to employment, health care, and education rights by the exclusionary policies of the household registration system (*hukou*), which maintains distinctions between permanent and temporary workers as established by urban or rural residence, migrant rural workers are subject to a process of “unfinished proletarianization” that leaves them in a condition of permanent transience and dislocation.<sup>25</sup> “China’s economy needs the labour of the rural population but does not need the city-based survival of that population once market demand for rural-to-market urban migrants’ labour power shifts in either location or industry. This newly forming working class is permitted to form no permanent roots and legal identity in the city.”<sup>26</sup> In many ways replicating domestically what obtains globally with “guest” or migrant contract workers who are excluded from citizenship in the host countries where they work, the ambiguous identity and floating condition of Chinese rural migrant workers (the new *dagong* class) depend on the territorial segregation of the place of their social reproduction, as a means of radically discounting the costs of this labor force and their exclusion from rights to social goods.<sup>27</sup> Since rural communities long exercised the extended planning of life activities, “the reproduction of labor of the next generation is left to rural villages, which bear the cost of industrial development in urban areas, even though the ability of rural communities to meet reproduction costs is often highly constrained.”<sup>28</sup> In effect, through the crucial role of the state, which oversees the differential zoning of living wages (i.e., rates of exchange of labor reproduction) through sovereign control over territory, rural communities subsidize the costs of social reproduction of a floating, surplus population whose disposability and absolute “liquidity” is precisely what is necessary to ensure the freedom of movement of capital.

More, the very disposability of these territorialized national populations allows them to serve as securitized assets for the speculative maneuvers of neoliberalist state and state-allied economic subjects—the condition of possibility of the latter’s participation in the global financial market. That is to say, in monetized aggregate form, surplus national populations effectively constitute the forced open horizon of the neoliberalist free market. *They constitute the virtual time zone of financial speculation within which new opportunities of value extraction and absorption of the risks of these maneuvers are located.* If indeed financial speculation finds opportunities for value extraction in the virtual zone of *time*—after all, what are commodity futures and “securities” (risk bundles) if not temporal commodities—then

surplus populations are nothing but an entire global zone of disposable life-times for speculative maneuvers. These disposable life-times are what are necessary to absorb the risks on which financial speculation depends (i.e., on which investors wager) and to guarantee the triple A-rated time value of prime mortgages and capital loans that proper neoliberal subjects require to fund and augment the value productivity of their life enterprises.

Insofar as speculation bets on price differentials over time, time is value productive. Such value-productive time is inextricable from the abstraction of human life. For neoliberal subjects, life is indistinguishable from labor; therefore the time of labor is the value-productive time of life. However, while for the neoliberal subject as entrepreneur of his/her own life (as capital) one's own time is value productive, for the investor, it is the time of others, the time of nonsubjects (their promised labor-time as embodied in the debts they take out or that is taken out on their behalf by their representative state), that can be bet upon or expended now for the extraction of value. The time of others is, importantly, graded to the extent that the worth of life-times varies considerably—life-time being the time of life making or time of social reproduction, which, with the devaluation of national currency and corresponding devaluation of the people that such currency represents, can be radically debased as a result of state economic policies (competitive currency devaluation, liberalization of protectionist tariffs, regulations), policing (repression of labor struggles, of alternative economies), and war (creation of displaced persons as surplus people through the destruction of communities and their means of subsistence, the making of uninhabitable conflict-ridden zones, forced migration, and other means). By means of the economic sovereign nation-state system, which determines the global exchange value of different populations, people are forced to increasingly subsidize (by shouldering) the costs of their reproduction (increasingly becoming “free” or zero-value labor) and to provide (through taxes) the surplus value directly appropriated through state “emergency” austerity measures and stimulus packages. The relative value of people's life-times must thus be viewed in similar terms as the varying potentials (or purchasing power) of money as a medium of exchange, or the different rates of exchange of monetary currencies, which rest on the unequal political and economic relations comprising the international system of sovereign territorial states.

In this view, the life-times of surplus people can be usefully seen as a form of “soft currency,” a medium of exchange that, unlike “hard currency,” cannot hold its value and may in fact depreciate rapidly, attesting to the importance of national sovereignty in the determination of money's potential.<sup>29</sup> As “soft currency,” that is, as medium of exchange rather than as measure or holder of value, the life-times of surplus people at the disposal of a state and its crony economic elites can thus function

as monetized assets used to leverage the latter's position in playing the global financial markets. Such disposable life-times constitute the liquid reserves that the state risks in its bid for foreign investments. In effect, the disposable life-times that surplus populations represent are precisely the quantified abstract future that is "colonized" (or mortgaged) in the speculative maneuvers of transnational and national elites, with the crucial agency of the state apparatus. From the side of disposability, the life of surplus people is the future begetting the present, generating the surplus value now accumulated as finance capital, which appears to be begetting value out of itself. Put another way, the seemingly limitless resource that is the future (as part of the seeming limitlessness of life itself) is in actuality the lives of people whose own futures are offered up as exchange values extractable in the present.

The condition of permanent transience of this human surplus, which issues from its absolute liquidity, thus presents a structure (or set of structures) of temporal experience that is in striking contrast to the "short-term" temporal framework of finance, most identified with neoliberalism, within which investor subjects seek to make the most out of the present by mortgaging and foreclosing on the future.<sup>30</sup> How do recent films that attempt to render cinematically the life of rural migrants, "floating populations," and slum dwellers in China and the Philippines offer us insight into the temporal structures of lived experience and life making for people caught in these zones of disposability? What do we make of these films' own forms of attention to the remaindered life of surplus populations?

### **People as Rubble: Temporalities of Spectacular Destruction**

One of the most striking emblems of the entwinement of land appropriation and human surplus within global neoliberalism is Jia Zhangke's cinematic image of the Three Gorges Dam in *Still Life* (2006); the dam is a public works project on the Yangtze requiring the flooding and complete submerging of the ancient town of Fengjie and the relocation of more than a million and half people together with the planned destruction of their homes and villages.

Much if not all of the commentary and scholarship on Jia has viewed this film, and the work of Jia more generally, as portraying the dramatic changes undergone by China in the era of neoliberal reform through an attention to the everyday lives of people who have been swept up by such changes and yet excluded from the promises of integration into the global market.<sup>31</sup> In marked contrast to Fifth Generation filmmakers' modernist depictions of mythologized pasts and "timeless" landscapes (an aesthetics that was itself a repudiation of the previous socialist-realist tradition and of the tenets of Maoist China more generally), Zhang Xudong argues, Jia

and his fellow Sixth Generation filmmakers “staged allegorical fragments of a broken, disoriented reality,” their sights trained on the ruins of a social landscape left in the wake of the turbulent transformations of Deng Xiaoping’s market reform era.<sup>32</sup> In this context, Jia’s films can be viewed, Zhang argues, as an attempt to cognitively map the brute yet barely visible or audible reality glossed over by the metaphysical image of China proffered by his predecessors. Seeking to document this subaltern reality, Jia focuses on the social fabric of *xiancheng* or the county-level city, not only as the setting of familiar scenes of demolition and construction characteristic of China’s grand transformation, but also as the ongoing *event* of social disaster wrought by this transformation: “an aching reminder of the failures and compromises of socialist industrialization, of the post-socialist reforms, and even of the sweep of market forces.”<sup>33</sup> The focus on *xiancheng* and its revelation of “the silent violence borne by a helpless population” as they find their entire worlds, communities, and norms of life subject to disappearance and extinction shape the recurrent theme of vanishing that marks Jia’s films and the aesthetic practices through which this theme is formally realized.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, for Zhang, *Still Life*, the English translation of the film’s original title, *Sanxia haoren* (*The Good People of the Three Gorges*), not only reflects Jia’s own literary interpretation of this film in terms of a neglected reality, a silent, everyday existence that preserves deep traces of time and therefore the durable secret of life; it also provides a concept for understanding the aesthetics of Jia’s filmmaking more generally as “at once a poetics of vanishing and a documentary of rescue.”<sup>35</sup>

The aesthetics of this cinematic attention to the vanishing, the immobile, and the silent offers a particular temporal structure for grasping the life-times of disposability as embodied in the lives of all the workers portrayed in the film, whom Jia describes as “more or less unemployed . . . more or less homeless, perpetually moving from one place to another with a sense of permanently being in exile.”<sup>36</sup> Counterposed to the accelerated tempo of state capitalist futurism, and its spectacular promulgation and effectuation of rapid, inexorable, and omnigenous change, Jia’s films tend toward the visual arrest and narrative suspension of that world-historical time of economic reforms as the backdrop of a more lingering, amplifying attention to precisely that form of simultaneous stillness and restlessness that is the everyday time of the perpetually displaced, the human ruins left in the wake of capitalism’s “creative destruction.” The dialectical image of these contradictory and yet also mirroring temporalities is precisely the content of a “present” that Jia seeks to dwell on against the vanishing effects and foreshortened universal temporality of the global market.

While in Jia’s “historical” film *Platform*, the irreversible time of history, the time of political events and economic transformations, appears only in narrative ellipses between scenes, to be gleaned in the small changes

on the material surfaces of everyday life (clothing, style, popular music), in *Still Life*, historical time appears frozen in the monumental infrastructural projects of the state, exemplified above all by the Three Gorges Dam and the magnificent suspension bridge that spans it—a built environment cast in the seeming suprahuman state and perennial temporality of nature and yet whose rapid and sudden emergence (through massive demolitions and large-scale construction) is experienced as surreal instantaneity. Such instantaneity is dramatized in one magical moment when, with a flip of the switch, the spectacularly lit bridge suddenly appears from out of the evening darkness, wondrously conjured by a state bureaucrat to impress his guests; but it is also depicted as an unremarkable part of the new scenery in the images of entire buildings collapsing in the background.<sup>37</sup>

Against the backdrop of this arrested time of history, imaged as the banalized spectacular time of things, Jia's camera lingers on and dilates—through slow, steady pans and exceptionally long takes—the foregrounded time of the nonevent, the sheer passage and duration of living in “real time” on the part of those whose homes have already been or about to be demolished, workers clearing the rubble of buildings they are tearing down, their own lives overnight turned into rubble to make way for the monuments of capital. *Still Life* provides many cinematic images of these opposed and yet mutually dependent times: the time of capital and the irreducible times of living destined toward waste. The near sublime monumentality of scale and profundity of consequence of China's transformations are, for example, encapsulated in the time image of the enormous lake that has taken the place of the ancient town of Fengjie, whose center now lies at the bottom of this seemingly placid, magnificent expanse of water signaling both the historic realization of a long-standing dream of modern progress and its catastrophic effect. In search of his long-lost wife whose last residential address turns out to be somewhere in the middle of this lake, migrant laborer Han Sanming, one of the two protagonists of the film, gazes at the liquid expanse before him with the same slow, steady, almost motionless, lingering attention that is a hallmark of Jia's cinema. Sanming's searching gaze is the cinematic gaze of rescue of a vanishing past, which is also present and future life. His seemingly empty expression registers time passing without visible reaction and yet in this way also registers unknown depths (of time, of experience, of life) beneath this seemingly empty recording of time as the unrepresented human costs of postsocialist reform, the ignored contents of capital's seemingly infinite resources of value extraction—entire life-times of lived and felt relations, borne disappointments and worked-up aspirations, pasts never to be memorialized, and imagined futures never to be realized—traced on the surfaces of a naturescape (“land”) that is the unconscious of capitalist freedoms.

Jason McGrath argues that the structuring of time characteristic of Jia's cinematic attention (slow and steady pans, exceptionally long takes, extremely long-shot compositions, and a relatively immobile camera)—a protracted temporality also evident in the “narrative distension” observed by Chris Berry in Jia's earlier films—presents “a radical vision of postsocialist realist time countering any master narrative of teleological progress . . . the time of the reform era's ‘losers’ rather than the more oft-represented ‘winners.’”<sup>38</sup> Understood as a form of realism, the temporal structure conveyed by this form of cinematic attention is posited as both the means of uncovering the “bleak urban reality” of excess populations (the human rubble of global neoliberalism) and the very temporal structure of “perpetual motion” lived by such populations. Indeed, it could be said that Jia finds in this distension of time passing—this protracted lived time beneath and beyond the time of historically significant actions and events (the time of narrative plots)—a form adequate to the ontological condition of these populations in their status as liquid assets of the state (i.e., nothing but directly expendable life-times): in a word, sheer duration becomes the objective correlative for disposable life.<sup>39</sup>

*Still Life* conveys the paradoxical condition of permanent transience of “floating populations” whose life-times are a form of excess with little to zero value except in large-scale aggregate form. On the one hand, the distension of time rescues not only a historical past and once-official present suddenly being evacuated but also a zone of human existence that I am arguing is a central feature of global neoliberalism—the zone, that is, of absolutely redundant life, with its status as sheer surplus time, the time of life as expenditure (comprising the virtual time zone of financial value “production”). The cinematic realization of a prolonged present, its dilation into a quasi-spatial condition, brings into perception this zone of disposable life-times as a devastated social landscape whose surfaces Jia attempts to read for the decoded vitality beneath its stilled existence. Against the volatility and frenetic pace of financial capital's radical presentism, Jia posits a temporal calm, an expanded and tranquil temporal passage (the present progressive tense) in which past and future are immanent or at least can be broached. Curiously, however, this dilation of presence by which the sheer disposability of human life is countered creates a sense of eternity that is reminiscent of natural landscape portraiture in classical scroll painting.<sup>40</sup> This sense is especially keen in the slow panning close-up shots of the faces and physiques of migrant workers on the boat on the river in the opening sequence of the film in the similarly slow panning medium shots of the bodies of Sanming's coworkers eating together with their shirts off. Here a certain timelessness has entered into the images of humans in *Still Life*, resembling what in the context of modern literature Kojin

Karatani has identified as people-as-landscapes, realism's representation of "ordinary people" as a reality from which modern subjects have been alienated.<sup>41</sup> In this way the sensation of eternity with which the landscape of disposable human life is imbued—a testament to their survival and an assertion of prevailing against disappearance that is nevertheless also "racializing" in its substantification of time and extension in space—can be viewed as the echo of the temporal structure of the "pseudo-nature" and "pseudo-cyclical time" of the spectacle, arrested in the landscape of capitalist-built form.<sup>42</sup>

The distension of time is, on the other hand, a means of the reversal of the abstraction, homogenization, and equivalence to which people's life-times are subjected (as monetized aggregates). In this way, the extension of the present is no longer the process of an infinite accumulation of abstract, equivalent units of time from the past and the future, such as it is in the evacuation of past and future (the past time of dead labor the future time of disposable life) in favor of extractable value in the present for neoliberal investor subjects. Instead, it is a mode of sustained perception that allows the slow revelation or unfolding of the singular qualities of living time, of authentically or actually lived times of life borne on the nonevents of gestures and the absence or sparing presence of words.<sup>43</sup>

In a scene when Sanming presents two bottles of liquor to his brother-in-law as an offering in his bid for information on the whereabouts of his wife, the gesture of his bowed head and outstretched hands is held for what seems an interminable time, without the brother-in-law ever being shown to accept the gift. In this held gesture, cinematic movement at a standstill, the very suspension of a time filled with unfulfilled expectation becomes itself the full content of the image. Here all the singular contents and trajectories of lives really lived as they leave their indelible traces on the bodies, comportment, gesture, and speech of these nonprofessional actors—the unabstractable passage of personal and shared, anonymous, everyday experience, the nitty-gritty details, matter, and texture of life-times made, maintained, spent, extended, and continuing, which comprise the lives of nonsubjects—are allowed the time to surface.<sup>44</sup> In such distentions there is time/attention enough to suggest "entire regions and territories of experience," layers of time, of life, of times of living (of the singular being within the mass, which Hortense Spillers calls the "one," "the small integrity of the now that accumulates the tense of the presents as proofs of the past, and as experience that would warrant, might earn, the future") excised from the official account of reforms' gains.<sup>45</sup> As Jia acknowledges: "To me, human beings are always what matters most. When I find myself in front of those people, I am always very moved. I am content simply to observe them, face to face, directly. So it seems right, respectful, to put into the

film those moments when nothing appears to be happening. I think there are very profound things involved in those moments.”<sup>46</sup>

### **International Aesthetics, Transnational Politics**

McGrath notes that Jia’s long-take aesthetic can be traced not only to the inspiring work of Hou Hsiao Hsien and Tsai Ming Liang, auteurs of the New Taiwanese cinema, which he held in high estimation, and the New Documentary Movement in China. It can also be traced to the favored aesthetic forms of international art cinema and the film-festival circuit, particularly elements of neo-Bazinian realism and the influential notion of the Deleuzian time image, which helped to make art cinema an “aesthetic and theoretical antipode to entertainment cinema.” This international framing of Jia’s cinema is important insofar as it points less to a national than to a transnational cinematic language whose particular regional efflorescence in East Asian and Southeast Asian alternative film highlights a broader aesthetic-political project being undertaken in relation to contemporary global conditions. In fact, McGrath’s description of the aesthetic imperative of Bazin’s “cinema of time” or “cinema of duration” touches on the salient concern: “The priority is to organize time not according to dramatic needs but rather in accordance with ‘life time’—the experience of time as simply duration in a life that is more fully of quotidian movement, inactivity, and boredom than spectacular events even in an era of dramatic historical change.”<sup>47</sup>

It is entirely persuasive to argue that the popularization of this temporal structuring of the cinematic image in accordance with “life-time” in international art circuits bespeaks an aesthetic-political movement against the growing global power of the spectacle, a broad critique of certainly the reifying process of Hollywood’s image production and perhaps also of “the cinematic mode of production” more generally.<sup>48</sup> It might even be viewed as part of a broader social movement to put into conceptual and affective language and expressive form that dimension of lived life that increasingly, as it has been overwritten by global capitalist history and negated by the pseudoevents proffered by the spectacular images of film and media, finds itself bereft of any means of perception and communication.<sup>49</sup> It seems to me vitally important, however, not to lose sight of the peculiar variations and contrasts of aesthetic practice within this transnational guild across the different social contexts of filmic production that it brings together. For such nuances help clarify not only the specific sociohistorical situations of disposable populations and the moments within the global capitalist dynamic that they inhabit but also the politics of these cinematic instantiations of the life-times of such populations.

On this view, it becomes instructive to consider Jia’s cinematic prac-

tices alongside those of Brillante Mendoza as sensory, attentional experiments shaped and delimited by the social contexts of human disposability that they attempt to render as well as by the histories of their own social conditions of production. Though both Jia and Mendoza attend to the human life remaindered by the spectacular productions and media of capital, it is Jia who in a more focused way brings into cinematic representation the surplused condition of such life through the perceptual structure of excess time, providing a filmic critique of neoliberalism's materialized time of spectacle through its dialectical image of the life-times of disposability in the form of surplus time. By representing the event of the making of a displaced floating population in *Still Life* and *24 City* as a protracted duration of "life-time," Jia provides a filmic genre critically opposed to neoliberalism's own materialized time of the spectacle.

For Mendoza, whose social contexts and conditions for thinking about human disposability are shaped by and the result of a much longer, more directly impactful history of globalizing capital—indeed, a history of neoliberalism that can be argued to have started not in the 1990s, as in the case of China, but in fact in the early 1960s with the deregulation of the national economy, including the unpegging of the peso from the dollar ("currency decontrol"), resulting in a devastating economic crisis and wholesale devaluation of Philippine labor<sup>50</sup>—the "event" of human disposability has been a slow, long-drawn process that now appears to be an enduring condition. Since the economic crisis of the 1960s, which ushered in a new political and economic era for Philippine national life characterized by the adoption and pursuit of strategies of export-oriented industrialization under the technocrat-guided authoritarian government of Ferdinand Marcos, a rural population displaced and dispossessed by debt-fueled agricultural "development" and industrialization has steadily grown, migrating to cities (mainly the greater metropolitan area of Manila) and to other countries in search of work.<sup>51</sup> Promoted and institutionalized by the Marcos government in 1974, the labor export industry overseen by the state began to channel an ever-increasingly significant portion of this latent surplus population abroad such that today no less than 10 percent of the national population has found temporary work abroad.<sup>52</sup> It is in effect the remittances from this overseas labor force engaged in largely precarious social reproductive work for their host societies (as producers of valorizable life-times for metropolitan biopolitical subjects and as buffers and supplements for neoliberal state withdrawal from social reproduction) and importantly the forced taxation of such remittances by the state that sustain the conditions for a constantly self-renewing "stagnant surplus population" in the Philippines.<sup>53</sup>

While neoliberalism in advanced capitalist economies might seek to liberate individual entrepreneurial freedoms (for the post-Fordist worker by making "life" directly value productive), the provision of the "tempo-

ral surplus value” required for the exercise of such freedoms depends on the fostering and maintenance of transnational familial and parakinship networks as the means by which migrant workers subsidize the devalued conditions of their own social reproduction at home (their own cheapened “life-times”). As they cycle in and out of these global labor-commodity chains, they not only act as producers of valorizable life-times for others but also effectively serve as the channel and media through which such accumulable time values are extracted and transferred from these pools of disposable life-times, the ever-devaluing times of social reproduction of stagnant surplus populations, to metropolitan biopolitical subjects.<sup>54</sup>

Two things are important to note in this brief political economic history. The first is the very slow temporality of “neoliberal” transformations in the Philippines, which can be said to have been taking place over the last fifty years, as opposed to the speed with which these have taken place in China over less than two decades. This is not merely a comparative relation. On the one hand, China’s closure throughout the Cold War since 1949 crucially helped to shape the rise of a capitalist regional economy of the Asia Pacific, including the ascendance of Japan and the newly industrializing countries (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore), which served as the Philippines’s sources of foreign capital investment as well as destinations for its labor export. This sequestration of China, among other features of the Cold War, including crucially political and military strategies of “security” to safeguard foreign investments, enables the gradual and steady dispossession and displacement of people that results in surplus populations. On the other hand, communist China also served as an exemplar of political-cultural strategies and ideals for the radical movement that grew out of the very same conditions of crisis in the 1960s that heralded the beginning of the Philippines’s “neoliberal” transformation, influencing directly and indirectly the development of a literary and cinematic language (social realism) for “the masses,” immiseration, and urban slum life that Mendoza and his collaborators are both steeped in and compelled to resignify.<sup>55</sup>

The second thing is the way the relatively gradual, though fitful, process of making surplus populations through the eruption and “resolution” of political and economic crises since the early 1960s has effectively created the conditions of permanent stagnation for expanding urban zones of social life, to which the designation “slums” is often applied. As perhaps one of the most important means of crisis resolution or management, the channeling of a ratio of this floating population abroad through the mechanisms of the labor export industry during this relatively extended period of “neoliberal” transformation sustains the enduring existence of that stagnant surplus population left behind, a population permanently excluded from formal employment (absolutely redundant and no longer

“floating” in the sense of cycling in and out of the formal labor force) and entirely devoted to the informal, reproductive work of subsisting without the possibility of attaining the exchange value of labor power. This “enduring” condition of human superfluosity means that it is neither perceived as an event (of expulsion or disappearance) nor understood as an immanent fate. Rather, it is simply a mode of life.

In this historical context, it is not altogether surprising to see the marked differences in Mendoza’s own experiments with the transnational aesthetic of neorealism from those of Jia’s. These differences are particularly evident in his cinematic structuring of experiential time.

### **People as Coin: Temporalities of Stagnant Liquidity**

The opening sequences of three of his films, *Tirador (Slingshot)* (2007), *Serbis (Service)* (2008), and *Lola (Grandmother)* (2009), display the characteristic temporal structures of Mendoza’s work as they each introduce the geographical setting of the film through a protracted series of alternately long and short takes of a movement through space, closely tracked by a mobile, handheld camera. In *Tirador*, the movement is of the light of police flashlights burrowing through the dark alleyways of a slum neighborhood, picking out in passing inspection random details of ramshackle structures, catching out human figures in the middle of evening activities, and, as voices warn everyone of an imminent raid, effectively pushing people out of the way, scattering them into the darkness of their homes. In *Serbis*, after an initial scene of “looking” at a girl dressing and primping before a mirror, the movement is of a woman going up and down the many maze-like staircases of an old, dilapidated movie theater, going in and out of rooms, in and out of the shadows of unlit hallways, checking in with other characters who live and work in the theater, their own smaller movements also tracked with a similar scoping camera motion as in the first scene. And in *Lola*, the movement is of an old woman accompanied by her young grandson, buying a candle, stopping in a church to say a prayer, effortfully making her way through rubbish-strewn, rundown, harsh concrete urban spaces to reach a blighted, empty site below the side of a bridge where she struggles, against a strong wind, to light and set down the candle between two pieces of concrete rubble, before making her way back up to and across the bridge.

There is in all of these opening sequences, but perhaps most acutely in *Lola*, a sense of the passage of “real time” that is not the sense of sheer duration or time passing effected by the favored long take.<sup>56</sup> Rather, the sense of “real time” is the result of an inordinately protracted, almost dogged, attention to an extremely banal, even chore-like set of actions strung along the barest narrative thread(s), which tends to constantly

induce but also disappoint anticipations of development. Composed of a series of long and short takes, a palpably mobile camera jerkily following the movement closely from behind or from the front, a tracking motion punctuated with static medium and distance shots, like short pauses in a walk to take a breath or the view, or recover one's balance or bearings, these sequences convey a rhythm of effort and busyness and low-intensity worry instead of placidity and boredom. In them there is simultaneously a lot and nothing going on, a form of running here and there yet going nowhere in the end or in particular, full of activity with next to nothing happening, actions without event. (Noisy and dense, replete with sensorial—visual and acoustic—input and movement, these are images *full* of the scattered leavings of time lived out, of life-times expended.) This is the rhythm of ignominious struggle on the part of the permanently “idle” and unemployed—composed of uneven, laborious, yet tedious times spent swimming in place in the stagnant pool of human refuse.

The times of ignominious struggle constitute a thematic as much as a formal feature of Mendoza's films. Indeed, the cinematic image he offers of the activities and goings-on of squatters, slum dwellers, petty thieves and swindlers, street vendors, drug addicts, and dealers in *Tirador* are all about visually and aurally communicating the texture, tenor, and timbre of the quotidian struggle of makeshift life-making, of living as getting by, of stealing and swindling and getting caught or getting away, of small-time hustling and wheeling and dealing, of conning and getting conned, of bearing routine harassment, arrests, and beatings at the hands of the police, of getting into and out of deadly scuffles, of eking out a living while money and life keep running out in equal measure. These are trying, exacting times punctuated with times of levity and enjoyment—the small-time pleasures and tortures of living on empty experienced like the small change gained and lost in the daily racket to survive.

This is hardly a metaphor: making a living is making the small change with which to buy more time of life. (In this case, life is the first and last term in the circuit C-M-C', with small change as the medium of coin with which to exchange life for life, the circuit of exchange with ever-diminishing returns that dead-ends without accumulable value.) Nowhere is this perhaps better cinematically represented than in the film *Lola*. In following *Lola*, a film about two grandmothers seeking redress, one struggling to find the money to bury her murdered grandson, the other struggling to find the money to free her arrested grandson as the alleged murderer, we bear the anxious tedium, seeming futility, and onerous effort comprising *the times of life lived as petty cash*. I want to suggest that the structure and object of attention in this film to some degree coincide: it is precisely the time of eking out a living, literally extending life for another day, the time

of making (or redeeming) lives of ever-diminishing value, times in which what is expended is life exchanged for money, not to gain but simply to extend (to “redeem,” in a nonmoral sense) life that is always on the verge of being completely exhausted.

The narrative of the painstaking, humiliating, exacting, and unyielding efforts to collect enough small change (efforts that are always constituted as passages of arduous travel, geographical and social) to bury one life and resuscitate another, efforts indissociable from living itself, so that we do not in fact retain the distinction between the grandmother of the still living and the grandmother of the already dead (two potential lives—futures—pulled out of circulation), is also the form of cinematic attention. Here, rather than suspension and distension, we experience the time of waiting as sluggish expenditure, rather than duration, perseverance. And like the grandmothers who eventually find what we might call some form of social justice in the reconciliatory meeting of their lives, and in the exchange of their accounts of their entire lifetimes as survivors (with money exchanged as the means of settlement between one life lost and one life saved), we experience through such passage not so much hope as the yield of longevity, but rather the unbelievable reprieve that the achievement of life simply continuing brings.

For Jia, disposable lives entail indefinite duration as the temporal structure of their unfolding, their life-times assuming spatial form in the course of this temporal dilation as surfaces of a rescued humanscape, the effect of slowing down the velocity of their wholesale expenditure as liquid assets (the velocity of their planned disappearance, as labor-commodities, from the sphere of circulation).<sup>57</sup> In his films, there is an attempt to restore time proper to disposable populations to make out of such time subjects of history, that is, to articulate the superfluousness of their life-times as a time of political reflection and critique. The aesthetic distance and contemplative stance of his gaze, as precisely the mode of critique, contrasts with Mendoza’s aesthetic of immersion and complicity in the times of constant negotiation and movement within stagnation. In Mendoza’s films, no subject of history can emerge.

If we view these films not as mere cultural symptoms of the material conditions out of which they emerge (unless by symptoms we mean spectacular commodities) but rather as themselves forms of production immersed in the very practices of production of value out of surplus life-times now characteristic of global financial capital, it is possible to argue that the exercise of Mendoza’s *abidance* with the life-times of disposability of stagnant populations offers a mode of political mediation (rather than subjectivation) that enables transformation from within those life-times rather than from without. In contrast to Jia, who uses the contemplative language of the spectacle to valorize the life that spectacular capital negates

and liquidates, Mendoza exploits the attention economy in which the spectator is called to labor in and through the image commodity (as prosumer, as playborer) in such a way as to enjoin him/her in a labor practice that hews intimately to the times of informal life making of the urban excess, here specifically and significantly figured by the widowed aged women who head their households, whose “desires,” as it were, or cares we are never given to understand. These aged women are the image-means and nontranscendent ideal of the labor of redeeming life through its expenditure. While undoubtedly harnessing attention for value production in the circuits of international art films, the cinematic experiment is hence also a pedagogical exercise, a form of training that makes us sensorially participant in the practice of producing the very time to be expended.

Made to experience cinematic time as a palpable, almost physical, effort of passage (through the visually and aurally dense and restless image), we are enjoined to engage in a gendered and aged practice of abidance that goes beyond the life-times of “eking out” a living. This a practice of following, of culling the loose and petty change of one’s own living and the living of neighbors, friends, and kin, suturing the fraying skeins of cooperation that keep one afloat as one moves through the debris of social waste that is one’s dwelling, to salvage not any abstract form of worth but rather simply a person who is one’s bond, one’s care. To the extent that what these single, old women redeem is life already expended or being expended, futures spent, these are remaindered life-times—times of life making in excess of the times of reproduction of disposable existence. For us, we find that our own engagement in this practicum of attending as accompaniment, of making time, produces a time of living that is also ours, life-times that are not fully subsumed by apparatuses of capture or consumption or waste, but instead remains at our disposal as perhaps a resource to remake the rules of *just* life.

## Uneven Times

Chandan Reddy writes compellingly of global neoliberalism’s different relation to the nation-state between global North and South. While in the global South, the national citizen is split off from the state through the impediments imposed as yet-to-emerge welfare structures as a result of neoliberal economic policies; in the global North, the relation between citizen and state is only further consolidated. This consolidation consists of the reorganization of the redistributive functions of the welfare state such that they align with the social reproduction and growth of capital whose bearer is the US citizen, in the name of the security of whom the same redistributive functions are revoked from the racialized, poor, and noncitizen population.

Building on Reddy's critical disaggregation of global neoliberalism through an insistence on these indispensable geopolitical, spatially distributed social differences, I attend to further discrepancies but, here, of time—the uneven times of neoliberalism as it has been deployed the uneven times of neoliberalism as it has been deployed as an explicit ideology or implicit sociocultural logic, a form of political rationality, and a periodizing concept. Critiques of neoliberalism attentive to its uneven social stratifications see such stratifications in terms of subjective ideals normed by race, gender, sexuality, and class and, further, see these categories of difference as the means by which contemporary contradictions between state and capital, nation and state, are “resolved,” put to use and toward ends that only exacerbate the inequalities of our times.

My turn to temporality in processes of accumulation, dispossession, and survival is an attempt to think about this unevenness at a level beneath the threshold of visibility of subjects while acknowledging the real effects that the protocols of subjectivity under a regime of a financialized economy have on the conditions of life of precisely those nonsubjects who can only be apprehended in the recognizable social dresses of “bare life.” I do not, however, turn to “actually lived” life but instead to experiments in the very modalities of attention through which such life is abstracted and monetized in and as image commodities and image capital under contemporary modes of value extraction (cinema as one means of speculation) — after all, what is financial capital if not past, present, and future life-times imaged and circulated as value (where the “content” and even form of such life-times is secondary)? Turning to these experiments we see the way that various temporalities are invoked on the one hand as “ethnographic” realist attention to the life-times of survival on the part of disposable populations and on the other hand as attempts to instantiate particular life-times as political means of re-mediating social relations. In both cases, these experiments provide other forms of intelligibility beyond the normative subjective ideals of citizens and the racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed social formations that serve as those subjective ideals' constitutive others.

To attend to the uneven times of the global project of neoliberalism is to interrupt the coherence and homogeneity of the epoch that is assumed to be our shared global present (whether that global present is explained through a diffusionist or conjunctural account of neoliberalism, or a historically synchronous account in which different sites are affected by a global logic) and an interruption of the time of the “always already” for the redundant populations who are the long-standing victims of colonialism and imperialism (the “originals” of “original or primitive accumulation”). It is to place zones of disposable life in the periphery in dynamic relation to old and emerging centers of global capitalism, without relegating these zones or their life-making practices to merely the latter's dire effects.

Attending to the uneven times of “neoliberalist” transformations through the life-times of disability opens up the possibility of other genealogies for understanding those remaindered ways of *living* in the world that move and generate that world in ways we would otherwise be unable to take into political account.

## Notes

1. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 112.
2. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 226.
3. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 243.
4. Wendy Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 40.
5. Randy Martin, *An Empire of Indifference: American War and the Financial Logic of Risk Management* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 22, 36.
6. Martin, *An Empire of Indifference*, 36.
7. Maurizio Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action: Inequality, Insecurity and the Reconstitution of the Social,” *Theory, Culture, Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 109–33, 128.
8. As Neil Smith points out, Woodrow Wilson “more than anyone pioneered the transformation of liberalism into a left-leaning immune system against socialism in America.” Neil Smith, *The Endgame of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 38.
9. Work on race and subprime mortgages is particularly helpful in drawing this out. See especially Melinda Cooper and Angela Mitropolous, “In Praise of Usura,” *Mute* 2, no. 13, [metamute.org/editorial/magazine/mute-vol-2-no.-13-%E2%88%92-out-time](http://metamute.org/editorial/magazine/mute-vol-2-no.-13-%E2%88%92-out-time) (accessed 3 April 2012), which argues that financial crisis is the effect of usury from below. Also Paula Chakravartty and Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction,” in “Race, Empire, and the Crisis of the Subprime,” special issue, *American Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2012): 361–85.
10. Melinda Cooper, “The Living and the Dead: Variations on De Anima,” *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 7, no. 3 (December 2002): 81–104.
11. Cooper, “The Living and the Dead,” 96.
12. Cooper, “The Living and the Dead,” 96.
13. Lazzarato, “Neoliberalism in Action,” 122.
14. Melinda Cooper, “Insecure Times, Tough Decisions: The Nomos of Neoliberalism,” *Alternatives* 29 (2004): 520.
15. Cooper, “Insecure Times, Tough Decisions,” 521. On the role of the New World in the constitution of sovereign power and the genealogy of international law, see also the important work of John D. Blanco, “Subjects of Baroque Economy: Creole and Pirate Epistemologies of Mercantilism in the Seventeenth-Century Spanish and Dutch (East) Indies,” *Encounters* 1 (2009): 27–62.
16. Cooper, “Insecure Times, Tough Decisions,” 528.
17. *Ibid.*, 527, 528. This is exemplified in the discursive deployment of “crisis” during and in the aftermath of financial collapse as part of political maneuvers to restore and even expand the very mechanisms of value extraction and conditions of

capitalist accumulation (deregulation, privatization, liberalization) that led to the collapse in the first place.

18. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 787.

19. Walden Bello argues that the most spectacular case of the integration of noncapitalist strata to shore up a fall in the rate of profit is China, “the world’s second biggest exporter and the primary destination of foreign investment” (Walden Bello, “Capitalism in an Apocalyptic Mood,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* [2008], [www.fpif.org/articles/capitalism\\_in\\_an\\_apocalyptic\\_mood](http://www.fpif.org/articles/capitalism_in_an_apocalyptic_mood)). It is not only a primary source of goods for the US market but also for capital speculation.

20. Xiao-Yuan Dong, Paul Bowles, and Hongqin Chang, “Managing Liberalization and Globalization in Rural China: Trends in Rural Labour Allocation, Income and Inequality,” *Global Labour Journal* 1, no. 1 (2009): 32–55.

21. As a massive aggregate, the life-times of disposable people serve, like nature, as a free and seemingly infinite resource or fund that (by being “securitized”) underwrites the profits of speculative financial capital—the very bottom of the Ponzi scheme that allows the first-takers to abscond with the “value” purportedly produced by the market. Christian Marazzi explains how this worked in the financialization of real estate:

The expansion of subprime loans shows that, in order to raise and make profits, finance needs to involve the poor, in addition to the middle class. In order to function, this capitalism must invest in the bare life of people who cannot provide any guarantee, who offer nothing apart from themselves. It is a capitalism that turns bare life into a direct source of profit. It does so on the basis of a probability calculation according to which the lacking debt repayment is considered “manageable,” i.e., negligible, when considered on the sale of the entire population.

See Christian Marazzi, *The Violence of Financial Capitalism*, trans. K. Lebedeva (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2010), 40. The poor serve as the most exposed securitized assets “that will be the first to explode,” thus protecting the lower-risk or more secure assets.

22. As the current European debt crisis makes abundantly clear, national debt is the future life of the population (*biopolis*) promised, with its present life as collateral. Hence austerity measures to service this debt entail collecting on this present life (note the violence of this diminishment as registered by the elderly Greek man who committed suicide), even advancing that future life by discounting the entire population.

23. Silvia Federici, “On Capitalism, Colonialism, Women and Food Politics: An Interview with Silvia Federici by Max Haiven,” *Politics and Culture* 2009, no. 2 (2009), [politicsandculture.org/2009/11/03/silvia-federici-on-capitalism-colonialism-women-and-food-politics](http://politicsandculture.org/2009/11/03/silvia-federici-on-capitalism-colonialism-women-and-food-politics).

24. For a discussion of the distinction between value-productive life subject to real subsumption and disposable life subject to formal subsumption, see my “Life-Times in Fate-Playing,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (2012): 783–802.

25. Pun Ngai, Chris King Chi Chan, and Jenny Chan, “The Role of the State, Labour Policy and Migrant Workers’ Struggles in Globalized China,” *Global Labour Journal* 1, no. 1 (2010): 132–51.

26. Pun, Chan, and Chan, “The Role of the State,” 137.

27. Of course, this is also true in the case of regular waged labor, with the house serving as the segregated place of social reproduction where the wage is

subsidized by devalued women's domestic work. The difference in the case of floating labor populations is that the entire place of social reproduction is discounted. *Dagong* means "working for the boss" or 'selling labour.'" "In contrast to *gongren* or urban worker, which carried the highest status under Mao, *dagong* signifies a lesser identity as a hired hand in the market." See Pun, Chan, and Chan, "The Role of the State," 136.

28. Pun, Chan, and Chan, "The Role of the State," 137.

29. "Cash stands to capitalist money as popular justice to state law: preexisting its incorporation into, and monopoly by, the liberal state but never successfully completely tamed. This analogy and homology is also another reminder of the importance of citizenship in the realization of money's potential. Currency and type and citizenship can be foregrounded or backgrounded as differentiating principles, but the 'legal' component of 'legal tender' is always a constituent of people's capacities to deploy it." Jane I. Guyer, "Cash Economies" (unpublished paper presented at the Rethinking Economic Anthropology: A Human-Centered Approach conference, London School of Economics, London, January 11–12, 2008).

30. Also see Karen Ho, *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), especially chap. 6, "Liquid Lives, Compensation Schemes, and the Making of (Unsustainable) Financial Markets," 249–94.

31. Wang Hui, "Jia Zhangke's World and China's Great Transformations: A Revised Version of a Speech Given at 'The *Still Life* Symposium' at Fenyang High School," *positions* 19, no. 1 (2009): 217–28.

32. Zhang Xudong, "Poetics of Vanishing: The Films of Jia Zhangke," *New Left Review* 63 (May–June 2010): 71–88.

33. *Ibid.*, 77–78.

34. *Ibid.*, 85.

35. *Ibid.*, 87.

36. Stéphane Mas, "Painting with a Political Camera: An Interview with Jia Zhangke," translated from the French by Paul Willemen, [peauneuve.net/article.php3?id\\_article=171](http://peauneuve.net/article.php3?id_article=171) (accessed 21 February 2013).

37. "The pseudo-events that vie for attention in the spectacle's dramatizations have not been lived by those who are thus informed about them. In any case they are quickly forgotten, thanks to the precipitation with which the spectacle's pulsing machinery replaces one by the next." Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 114.

38. Jason McGrath, "The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Post-socialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic," in *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Zhen Zhang (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 81–114, 89–90. Similarly Jean Ma argues: "The incommensurabilities plaguing post-socialist China find expression through techniques of temporal distension that insist upon a prolonged gaze at enigmatic ruins of socialist-industrial past that mingle with signs of the new." See Jean Ma, *Melancholy Drift: Marking Time in Chinese Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 149.

39. Others have remarked on this temporal dilation with respect to *24 City*. Staging the human wasting process intrinsic to the general dynamics of capitalist production, paradigmatically exemplified in the forced layoff of workers from the permanently shut-down factory in Chengdu, *24 City* produces postsocialist time as an epochal change (the transformation of structures of collectivity and their relegation to subsidiary means of production) experienced as an indefinite suspension of the present. Jiwei notes for example how, through his extremely long takes and

induced further through the use of poetry and photographic stills, Jia strives “to battle the world in transience: he must act as if his camera could outstrip the fluctuating present by gazing at it hard enough and long enough and by registering its minute-by-minute change, as if reality were always on the cusp of disappearing.” Jiwei Xiao, “The Quest for Memory: Documentary and Fiction in Jia Zhangke’s Films,” *Senses of Cinema* 59 (June 2011), [sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/the-quest-for-memory-documentary-and-fiction-in-jia-zhangke-%E2%80%99s-films](http://sensesofcinema.com/2011/feature-articles/the-quest-for-memory-documentary-and-fiction-in-jia-zhangke-%E2%80%99s-films).

40. Jia asserts that the images of the nature in *Still Life* (river, mountain, fog) are “taken from fundamental elements in Chinese painting. That is why I use those panning shots, recalling the gesture of unrolling a classical scroll painting, opening it out in space. So, on the one hand, there is that natural beauty and then on the other, there is a certain beauty also in destruction.” See Mas, “Painting with a Political Camera.”

41. “Realism in modern literature established itself within the context of landscapes. Both the landscapes and the ‘ordinary people’ (what I have called people-as-landscapes) that realism represents were not ‘out there’ from the start, but had to be discovered as landscapes from which we had become alienated.” Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 29.

42. Substantification of time and extension in space that is “the undifferentiated mass, floating somewhere outside the passage of time, like an eternal essence.” Colette Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 53. As Guy Debord suggests in *Society of the Spectacle*, the expropriation of the time of producers of time-as-commodities is what allows the reign of capitalist progress. It is the resource from which is taken the “temporal surplus value” enjoyed by the social classes who monopolize the making of history, and therefore the time of the spectacle, as the “time appropriate to the consumption of images”: “The spectacular restoration of time was only possible on the basis of this initial dispossession of the producers” (114).

43. As Jia relates to Dudley Andrew with reference to *24 City*: “it was through words that we aimed to reveal memory and the past. We also wanted to use poetry to evoke certain feelings, the kind of poetry that can resonate with ordinary speech. I have this strong feeling that contemporary mainstream films depend increasingly on action, which gets faster and faster all the time. But people have complex feelings that can often be more accurately and deeply expressed through language. So why not make a movie that returns to words? Why don’t we let words bring their lives back to those people?” Jia Zhangke, interview by Stéphane Mas, *Film Quarterly* 62, 4 (Summer 2009): 80–83, esp. 80.

44. This is what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak refers to as the psychobiography of the subaltern. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Hortense Spillers refers to it as the experiences of the “one,” “a psychic model of layered histories of a multiform past . . . the only riskable certain or grant of a social fiction . . . concrete and specific, even if anonymous.” See Hortense Spillers, “All the Things You Could Be by Now If Sigmund Freud’s Wife Was Your Mother,” in *Female Subjects in Black and White*, ed. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 141.

45. Spillers, “All the Things,” 141.

46. Mas, “Painting with a Political Camera.”

47. McGrath, “The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke,” 98–99.

48. Jonathan L. Beller, *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy*

and the *Society of the Spectacle* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2006).

49. “Such individual lived experience of a cut-off everyday life remains bereft of language or concept, and it lacks any critical access to its own antecedents, which are nowhere recorded. It cannot be communicated.” Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 114.

50. Kim Scipes, “Global Economic Crisis, Neoliberal Solutions, and the Philippines,” *Monthly Review* 51, no. 7 (December 1999).

51. Though it is perhaps correct to argue that “the logic of the Marcos regime, like the logic of the earlier Philippine political economy, is much better understood in terms of strategies of accumulation by diversified family conglomerates than in terms of battles among coherent economic strategies or sectors,” as Emmanuel S. de Dios and Paul D. Hutchcroft argue, it is also true that the extractive strategies deployed by ruling elites changed in accordance with transformations in the regulatory logic of international practice. Crony capitalism as paradigmatically practiced under the Marcos regime as a form of privatization of profits and nationalization of costs and risks (through what would now be called “public-private partnerships”) was driven and sustained by foreign loans largely from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which promoted export-oriented industrialization. Emmanuel S. de Dios and Paul D. Hutchcroft, “Political Economy,” in *The Philippine Economy: Development, Policies, and Challenges*, ed. Arsenio Balisacan and Hall Hill (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003).

52. The labor export industry was built on the US Exchange Visitor Program established at the beginning of the Cold War in 1948, through which the mass migration of Philippine nurses to the United States from the mid-1950s to the late 1960s was facilitated. Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2003); Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

53. Remittances sustain the neoliberal postcolonial state, not only as a source of direct profit through taxation but also by serving as one of the Philippines’s top sources of foreign exchange (US \$16 billion in 2008; in July 2009, remittances was the second-highest-earning export product, after electronic products). Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export*, xiv. At the same time, remittances subsidize through familial and kinship networks the subsistence of a population permanently excluded from formal employment.

54. In the context of commercial surrogacy in India, Kalindi Vora also writes of a similar transfer of “vital energy as the content of what is produced and transmitted between biological and affective producers and their consumers.” Kalindi Vora, “Limits of ‘Labor’: Accounting for Affect and the Biological in Transnational Surrogacy and Service Work,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (2012): 681–700, esp. 684.

55. The aesthetics of both social realism and socialist realism have had a long career of influence in Philippine cinema (exemplified in the work of Lino Brocka and Ishmael Bernal), dominated on the one hand by a commercial tradition of melodrama, fantasy, action, and romance film, and on the other recently challenged by a more modern, visually cleaner and more naturalist version of realism in digital feature films. There is also a strong alternative digital movement, composed of social documentaries and experimental film. Brillante Mendoza’s work would fall in the latter, between the two categories.

56. In *Lola*, there is a scene on the train when we overhear two Americans planning to film the reality they are encountering with long-take shots—Mendoza’s jab at the international art circuit.

57. For Marx, the velocity of the currency of money reflects “the rapidity with which commodities change their forms, the continued interlacing of one series of metamorphosis with one another, the hurried social interchange of matter, the rapid disappearance of commodities from the sphere of circulation, and the equally rapid substitution of fresh ones in their place” (Marx, *Capital*, 136).