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Monstrous Dialogues: THE HOST and South Korean Inverted Exile

James Lloyd Turner

University of South Florida, mssladeebugz@aol.com

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Monstrous Dialogues:

The Host and South Korean *Inverted Exile*

by

James Lloyd Turner

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Amy Rust, Ph.D.
Scott Ferguson, Ph.D.
Margit Grieb, Ph.D.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
How and Why the Monster Speaks: <i>The Host</i> as an Aesthetic Dialogue of Inverted Exile.....	1
Aesthetic dialogue.....	5
Aesthetic dialogue in <i>The Host</i>	7
Inverted exile	12
Inverted exile in <i>The Host</i>	15
The scholarly dialogue.....	17
Sites of dialogue.....	21
The Monster on the Han River: Inverted Exile and the Feminine Monster.....	25
Origins.....	28
The monster's gendered body.....	31
Gendered Landmarks	36
The cacophonous, climatic dialogue of <i>The Host</i>	42
Skyscrapers and Deep Wounds: The New Korean City and the Anxieties of Past and Present.....	49
The corporate skyscraper	53
Hospitals and fictional viruses	62
The Feminine Patriarch: Domestic Life in Inverted Exile.....	71
The Park home/shop	72
Excesses of <i>The Host</i> 's domestic spaces	75
Inverted exile and abjection.....	77
<i>Barking Dogs</i> and embracing the West	79
<i>Mother</i> and rejecting the West.....	84
<i>The Host</i> and cathartic rebirth.....	87
Beyond <i>The Host</i> : Inverted Exile and the Cinema of Change.....	91
References.....	96
Bibliography	98

Abstract

Bong Joon-ho's monster movie blockbuster, *The Host* (*Gweomul*, 2006), is the most commercially successful film in South Korean cinema history. The film's popularity and significance derive from its unearthing of the ambivalence concerning South Korea's rapid transformation from a rural dictatorship to an urban democracy with one of the strongest economies on the planet. This ambivalence is buried beneath a veneer of "progress" blanketing contemporary South Korea and constitutes a condition I call *inverted exile*. *The Host* explicitly engages life in inverted exile through my notion of *aesthetic dialogue*. Aesthetic dialogue, takes influence from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and allows for proliferation of meaning beyond authorial intent by focusing on *The Host*'s context. My approach focuses on genre, narrative, and style to flesh out the political, historical, and social ambivalences behind any given moment of *The Host* to put them in dialogue with one another. The project progresses through sites of cultural dialogue central to the film and/or life in inverted exile: the monster, the city, the home. I approach each site through the genres associated with them and gender roles each of them assume in inverted exile. South Korea's transformation and its relationship with the United States are causes of anxiety (e.g. loss of traditional values, overwhelming Western influence) and desire (political freedom, economic opportunity). Ultimately, I argue, *The Host* suggests that South Korea and its citizens need to embrace the ambivalences of inverted exile and actively shape an identity that takes an active and critical attitude towards Western influence. Such an attitude can better preserve the desirable aspects of

traditional culture (e.g. traditional food, familial unity) and alleviate the anxieties caused by Western influence (e.g. rampant consumerism, unjust class divisions). *The Host's* dialogic form is integral to its shaping of Korean identity as it takes from multiple cultural sources (i.e. Hollywood and Korean history) without challenging their polarization.

**How and Why the Monster Speaks:
The Host as an Aesthetic Dialogue of Inverted Exile**

The Host (*Gweomul*, 2006) is the largest commercial success in the history of Korean cinema—marking it as a product of a westernized, industrial South Korea. *The Host* suggests the need for a Korean identity that is active and critical through aesthetic dialogue that reveals the ambivalence buried beneath the veneer of “progress.” I call this ambivalence *inverted exile*. South Korea’s ambivalent social, economic, and political relationships with outside powers (most recently, the United States) manifest culturally through *aesthetic dialogues* that bring voices of Korea’s past into contact with the present moment and Western influence to address the anxieties and desires of contemporary South Korea.

Released in 2006, *The Host* is the third film of Bong Joon-ho. It arrived at the height of the Korean cinema boom and quickly broke domestic records and garnered a relatively expansive international release. The film is the product of South Korea’s westernization and economic success, just like its director. Bong is Catholic; Catholicism has become the most popular religion in South Korea under western influence. In the 1980s, he was a college student and an activist. He fought for the democracy that South Korea currently employs and against American exploitation in Korea. His ambivalence towards the West is felt through his excitement over Hollywood—to which he was first exposed through a television channel for American armed forces in South Korea. In

regard to Hollywood and its influence on his films, Bong says, “It’s like you want to be influenced, but you don’t want to be overwhelmed” (qtd. in Klein 872-3).

In *The Host*, pollution from an American military installation in South Korea provides the seed for the birth of a monster that emerges from the Han River. The monster kills several Koreans in its first appearance before making off with Hyun-seo (Ko Ah-sung), the youngest member of the Park family (the film’s protagonists). Rather than attempt to destroy the monster and save the girl, the Korean and American governments believe a virus caused by the monster to be the more pertinent threat. Quarantine is ordered and the remaining members of the Park family become fugitives in order to hunt down the monster and save Hyun-seo. Meanwhile, the Korean and American governments begin drastic action in order to destroy all traces of the virus, which does not exist.

The Host is a product of a South Korea that has utterly transformed since the mid-20th century. Prior to the end of World War II, Korea was under Japanese colonial rule and since the division of the Korean peninsula after the war, South Korea has had a neocolonial relationship with the United States. Under the influence of the United States, South Korea has become an industrial and economic global powerhouse, allowing for the personal freedoms and comforts associated with so-called first-world status. However it has also seen a loss of traditional values and culture. American cultural forms hold sway and traditional family structures struggle in westernized South Korea. South Koreans have seen their country change around them, and with these changes come myriad pleasures *and* anxieties—creating an ambivalent experience: inverted exile. *The Host* arrives as a distinct product of this context. Its production would not have been possible

without the freedoms allowed under democratic rule, the money available thanks to South Korea's economic success, and even the assistance of the United States as the monster was animated by a company in San Francisco. These circumstances become voices in the aesthetic dialogue of *The Host*.

The Host quickly became the biggest success in Korean cinema history, both domestically and abroad. Its international success is not surprising, as South Korean pop culture has become hugely popular throughout Asia, garnering the nickname *Hanryu* (Korean Wave). The films of the Korean Wave (New Korean Cinema) have achieved international attention and are products of what is now one of the strongest local film industries on the planet. I claim the film's popularity and significance are derived from its treatment of life in inverted exile. While filmmakers like Park Chan-wook and Kim Ki-duk garner more critical attention in the West, Bong's films are the most explicit in their handling of contemporary Korean identity because they lay bare the ambivalence of a first-world Korea. As a blockbuster monster movie spectacle, *The Host* revels in the desires of a westernized Korea. Simultaneously, the film's stylistic and narrative quirks (e.g. the grounding of the monster's origin in contemporary controversy, an epidemic plot with a diegetically fictional virus, and melodramatic focus on domestic mise-en-scène) expose contemporary anxieties. In this respect, by first working through *The Host*, I and other scholars can gain greater insight into the works of other inverted exilic and New Korean filmmakers like Park and Kim. *The Host* participates in a process of Korean identity formation that is rooted in ambivalence. South Korean identity is a constantly shifting entity shaped through an ambivalent procedure of simultaneously appropriating and denigrating outside cultures. This pattern has developed through ambivalent

relationships with world powers (e.g. Japan and the United States) throughout Korean history.

By looking at *The Host* as an aesthetic dialogue I engage the film at levels of genre, narrative, and formal style in order to illustrate the social, political, and cultural significance of sites of dialogue in the film. Through aesthetic dialogue, meaning proliferates as a product of *The Host*'s context. Voices beyond the intent of Bong Joon-ho interact to uncover the ambivalence of inverted exile hidden beneath the countenance of success and progress that envelops contemporary South Korea. My approach takes inspiration from Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian literary theorist who claimed that numerous "languages" exist within every novel. These languages are wrought with social significance that imbues the text with meaning beyond its plot. Instead I describe these languages as voices that emanate from liminal spaces in a text.

Each of the three chapters of my project takes on a specific site of ambivalence that is a product of inverted exile and expressed as aesthetic dialogue: the monster, the city, and the home. As a primary concern of each chapter, I will take up the genre or genres associated with each site, including the monster movie, melodrama, and noir. Bound up in each site and genre is a relationship to gender that the ambivalence of inverted exile reshapes. These chapters are motivated towards arguing how *The Host* shapes contemporary South Korean identity by embracing ambivalence in order to transform South Korea's relationship with both the west and its own culture. *The Host* figures passive relationships negatively, including Korean subordination to the west. By embracing both the anxieties and desires of inverted exile through an attitude that is critical of American influence and active in controlling its relationship to it, South

Koreans can create a more nurturing nation whose destiny is not wholly dictated by the West.

Aesthetic dialogue

New Korean Cinema is the name given to the wave of contemporary commercial South Korean films that have bolstered Korea's film industry and garnered international attention. I describe this wave of popular cinema's new form, the Korean blockbuster, as an aesthetic dialogue. Aesthetic dialogues are cultural artifacts in which "voices" of ideological viewpoints, social contexts, and aesthetic conventions all come into contact. My notion of aesthetic dialogue takes inspiration from Bakhtin in order to address how the New Korean context shapes the significance of *The Host* both through and beyond Bong's intentions. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin argues that the language of the novel is stratified into a series of voices—not just the voice of the author, leading to his concepts of *polyglossia* and *heteroglossia*. Polyglossia is the existence of multiple "languages" within a text or cultural system. These languages can be distinct national languages (e.g., Korean and English), regional dialects, et cetera. Heteroglossia is the interaction of internal and external forces within a single utterance that govern its meaning. Internal forces that shape meaning are found within the text, like plot, meanwhile external forces are products of context, like the historical, political, or social connotations of a certain dialect in which a character speaks. The meaning of any single moment in a novel is shaped not solely by plot, but also through the interaction of historical, political, and social contexts. For instance, an author chooses to have a character speak in a particular dialect, a language not native to the author. This language is stratified into other languages like that of social groups, professions, or generations that

may utilize that particular dialect (272). Social and ideological contexts shape the meaning of any utterance. Bakhtin's goal was to separate scholarship on novels from scholarship concerned with poetry. He claims that poetic language has a single meaning, governed solely by authorial intention while the significance of novelistic language expands beyond plot and is shaped by external forces of context. By treating *The Host* as an aesthetic dialogue I will analyze how voices emerge from the film's genre(s), narrative, and style.

Central to aesthetic dialogue are context and ambivalence. New Korean Cinema is a product of South Korea's "development." The personal freedoms and economic successes facilitated by a first-world South Korea make the expressive liberty of filmmakers and investments of venture capitalists that gave birth to the Korean blockbuster. South Korean filmmaking budgets have skyrocketed to numbers upwards of sixty million dollars, but they are still but a fraction of the budgets of Hollywood blockbusters. Ambivalence towards Hollywood as an influence and a cultural imperialist competitor arises from this context. Domestic Korean productions compete with Hollywood over theater space and ticket sales. They do so while simultaneously borrowing from and demonizing Hollywood—the Korean blockbuster is rooted in ambivalence. Korean blockbusters utilize Hollywood generic conventions and editing styles. However, nationalistic marketing strategies for films like *The Host* demonize Hollywood by casting it in the role of other, making it an act of patriotism to patron a Korean film rather than an American film (Lee, 52). Immediately, any Korean blockbuster is a zone of dialogue between the success of the Korean film industry

fostered by South Korea's modernization and the tremendous influence of Hollywood's global domination.

Aesthetic dialogue in *The Host*

By addressing *The Host* at the levels of genre, narrative, and style, I am able to dissect the dialogue that comprises the film to better understand how it figures a new Korean identity that embraces the ambivalences of inverted exile. It does so as an answer to the unacknowledged ambivalence of American influence in South Korea. While South Korea's relationship with the United States has provoked beneficial economic and political reforms, it also has led to a decrease in traditional values, American legislative manipulation to ensure American profits in the region, and rampant individualism fueled by consumer culture. *The Host* posits that an active and critical attitude towards American influence that does not wholly embrace or reject the West. Genre, narrative, and style are significant for this purpose because they are riddled with implications that reveal ambivalences in the New Korean context. These categories serve as the foundation for the development of a dialogue that is shaped by the film's social, political, and historical context. In order to convey how aesthetic dialogues work, let us look at an early moment in *The Host*.

The monster emerges from the Han River, completely revealed to the spectator and begins to rampage through a park, killing several South Koreans. Bong's early reveal of the monster inverts conventions of the monster movie that typically show mere glimpses of the monster to build suspense for the eventual reveal. The monster movie genre is a product of Hollywood and Japan—it is not a staple of South Korean popular culture. Japanese and the American influence on South Korean culture are felt

immediately through genre choice. However, the film's inversions of conventions demonstrate ambivalence towards these cultures that have/had influence and political power over South Korea. Clearly the film does not completely embrace these outside influences. By simultaneously utilizing and inverting the conventions of a genre associated with outside cultural influences, *The Host* figures an active and critical attitude for South Korea and its citizens toward outside influences. I claim Hollywood and Japanese influence are not utterly rejected, but instead are conjured by the film only to be transformed.

Signs of South Korea's modernized status and consumer culture are coded as both dangerous and life-saving throughout the scene, bringing both the anxieties and desires of a first-world South Korea into the fray. A woman wearing headphones (presumably listening to an MP3 player) has no idea what is going on and is grabbed by the monster—her life lost because of her focus on individual comfort and consumer electronics. Another woman sitting on a monorail, a marker of an urban, industrialized Korea, but one utilized for collective use, is safe far above the monster's rampage. Unlike the headphones, the monorail benefits the collective; it creates unity rather than separation. The technological comforts and entertainment media of contemporary South Korea are sources of pleasure to its citizens. However, anxieties over individualism and the loss of traditional family values have developed from the New Korean context. Both are given voice in this scene.

Stylistically, the scene is rooted in Hollywood shooting and editing styles but departs from these through its use of long take at the start. These stylistic derivations show an ambivalent and critical attitude toward Western influence. The long shot of the

monster barreling towards the camera through people on the riverside pans to reveal the entire creature in profile as it makes its way inland. Rather than using a long shot as a practicality for the monster's reveal, the long shot calls attention to the small size of the monster. Bong's monster is about the size of a bus and clumsily gallops on four legs, inverting the conventions established by movies like *King Kong* (1933), which feature giant, physically dominant creatures. Rather than utilizing a long shot in which the monster fills the frame, the long shot that reveals Bong's monster has the creature surrounded by negative space, begging consideration of its limited stature. The large monsters of major cultural imperialist powers are inverted in Bong's small monster that addresses ambivalence towards their influence. A small Korean monster contrasts with the large monsters of major cultural imperialist power. South Korea's global influence is limited in comparison to the United States and Japan. As the monster runs out of frame, the camera remains over the shoulder of the film's protagonist, Park Gang-du (Song Kang-ho). The shot's length and willingness to allow the source of action to leave the frame distances *The Host* from the tropes of Hollywood style while establishing the prominence of a single male protagonist adheres to that commercial style, aligning the film with Western capitalism.

Hollywood style is in dialogue with the sensibilities of Bong Joon-ho and other Korean filmmakers that both take in Hollywood influence and push against it. As the monster rampages through a park, several short takes shot with a handheld camera establish the voice of contemporary American horror films that rely heavily on the unnerving effects of shaky-cam. The increased speed of editing at this moment also demonstrates adherence to commercial style, as it is quite typical for shot length to

decrease at moments of intense action in commercial films. Bong's adherence to commercial styles demonstrates no desire to completely shut out Western influence, but the stylistic derivations in *The Host* suggest that Koreans should take an active role in shaping identity in the face of change by pushing against American influence without casting it out.

Voices of monster movie generic conventions, Hollywood stylistics, and some of the pleasures and anxieties of industrial Korean life have joined the dialogue that is *The Host*. It is important to acknowledge that every moment of a text like *The Host* is riddled with implications, in both form and content, which come into contact. The New Korean context shapes this scene beyond the mere rampaging of a fictional monster in a park in Seoul. An ambivalent relationship with Hollywood and commercial cinematic convention that manifests through simultaneous utilization of tropes and stylistic derivations suggests that the Koreans need to actively shape their relationship with Western influence. This is what makes *The Host* an aesthetic dialogue and allows it to address the ambiguities of life in inverted exile.

Much of what I discuss in *The Host* is located in liminal spaces beyond the primary concerns of the film's plot. These liminal spaces are not explicitly acknowledged by Bakhtin. Though Bakhtin certainly complicates novelistic language by pulling it away from authorial intent, he still gives the author too much power as a text's organized center. "The author (as creator of the novelistic whole) cannot be found at any one of the novel's language levels: he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect." (49). Here, the author sits in a seat of control where (s)he masterfully organizes all of the languages of the text. Bakhtin calls this seat of control a *zone of*

dialogical contact. Placing the author at the center assumes that there are no liminal spaces in the text. Every voice, ideological viewpoint, and cultural context would pass through the center and be touched by the intentions of the author. My thesis, however, focuses on the liminal spaces of a text, granting Bong a dynamic position within the dialogues of his films that acknowledges intention through moments of centrality (such as genre choice) but does not forget that the historical, social, cultural concerns of inverted exile greatly shapes Bong's work and is not something over which he has control. It is in these liminal spaces that ambivalence is revealed.

Word choice also functions to separate my approach from Bakhtin's. He refers to a novel being comprised of several "languages." Though languages, as Bakhtin explains, are riddled with connotations beyond one's intention, the author does choose with what language he or she speaks. According to Bakhtin, the author "not only represents this 'language' but to a considerable extent he himself speaks in this 'language'" (45). By speaking "in" a particular "language," the author is able to choose just how he or she utilizes said language. A language may be riddled with connotations shaped by context, but the author still intended to use this language. My notion of aesthetic dialogue deals with "voices" buried within a text. While one can control language (to an extent), control of voices is far more limited. One's own voice is shaped through context, like the size and shape of one's vocal chords, and the voices of others are almost completely beyond one's control. By using the word voice I am emphasizing context in the service of fleshing out ambivalence—that ambivalence is South Korea's inverted exile.

Inverted exile

Exile is characterized by an uprooting from one's homeland, home, family, and culture—a drastic shift in geographical location that transforms every aspect of one's life. In a typical exilic context, an individual or individuals are forced from or must flee from their homeland and often, but certainly not always, begin a new life in a “developed” Western democracy. When a country drastically and rapidly changes around its citizenry, inverted exile is the result. Inverted exile carries many of the same effects of traditional exile without the change in location. Both forms of exile are shaped by ambivalence, through the coexistence of anxiety and desire. Anxiety over what has been lost—tradition, values, homeland—and desire for what has been gained including freedom from political oppression and possibilities for new economic opportunities.

Inverted exile in South Korea has been shaped by Korea's ambivalent relationship with the United States. After World War II, Korea was freed from Japanese colonial control (1910-1945) and split into the communist North and capitalist South by the Western powers. In the decades following the war, the South was governed by American-backed dictators who oppressed their citizens through violence and legislation that limited freedoms, while also taking measures to industrialize the country. Through this neocolonial relationship with the United States, South Korea rapidly transformed from an agrarian society to an industrialized, Western, democracy. These drastic changes have altered the lives of Korea's citizens in a similar manner to life in exile. While Koreans have not had to leave their country, it has changed all around them. The landscape has been radically altered—skyscrapers standing where open fields were not long ago. Western-style apartments in large urban centers have replaced houses in rural areas,

Catholicism has taken hold as the most popular religion, and the family unity that once made it commonplace for three generations to live under a single roof, has been marred by climbing divorce rates and a consumer culture that markets to atomized individuals. Loss of family values and a focus on individualism facilitated by neoliberal reforms have become major sources of anxiety that contrasts with the pleasures of personal freedom and economic success in contemporary South Korea. The infusion of Western culture and values into contemporary Korean life has created ambivalence akin to those experienced by individuals living in exile, thus inverted exile.

Though Korea's inverted exile is the product of a neocolonial relationship, inverted exile can be a product of internal forces as well. Weimar Germany is a past example of inverted exile that was not a product of colonialism or neocolonialism. In a short span, Germany transformed from a rural nation with a preference for authoritarian rulers into a republic centered on growing urban areas like Berlin. Though outside forces like France's sanctions placed on Germany after World War I contributed to the changes in Germany, ultimately, the Weimar Republic was formed internally.

A study of inverted exilic films has not been written, but Hamid Naficy's book, *An Accented Cinema*, addresses the similarities he sees between the films of filmmakers living in exile. His book is influential as it sheds light on filmmaking in inverted exile. Naficy considers exile (over which these filmmakers have no control) and the changes in values and lifestyle that accompany life in exile as a central factor in their filmmaking, imbuing these films with common features. Hollywood blockbusters, according to Naficy, strive toward the norm: they seek to lack accent (22-23). "Accented" films are at least slightly different from typical commercial films. Experimental exilic films have a

“thick accent,” demonstrating dramatic differences to typical commercial cinema, while the narrative films of exilic filmmakers may have a more subtle accent. Exilic narrative films play with form and content—blending genres and styles in a similar manner to Korean Blockbusters (e.g., *The Host* inverts monster movie conventions while blending them with an epidemic plot and noir stylistics). According to Naficy, multilingualism—the presence of multiple spoken languages demonstrating the change in cultural context of the filmmaker, ambivalence to both their homeland and their new home, and the use of long takes are all common stylistic attributes of exilic films. Many of these films use epistolary narratives, marking them as personal and emphasizing the “distance, separation, absence, and loss” (101) of exile. Journey narratives are also common—focusing on border crossings and sites like airports in which multiple cultures come into contact. The similarities between these films, despite differences in the specific locations and lives of their filmmakers, demonstrate the power of an author’s context. While filmmakers living in exile blend genres and styles to produce personal or experimental films, Korean Blockbusters do so to produce commercial products.

New Korean filmmakers living in inverted exile make commercial films. The Korean blockbuster presents differences between Naficy’s exilic filmmakers and my inverted exilic filmmakers. New Korean films are “accented” in a different manner, more closely adhering to the stylistic conventions of commercial cinema to explore the issues of a changing nation, not exiled individuals. Rather than merely mapping the ideas of Naficy onto the New Korean context, I wish to use his ideas to make sense of the role of cinema in identity formation within this often ignored context. Key to both Naficy’s study of exilic cinema and my project on *The Host* is ambivalence. Inverted exile puts the

present context into contact with historical moments to illustrate both the anxieties and desires wrapped up in South Korea's transformation through aesthetic dialogue. As an aesthetic dialogue, the narrative and mise-en-scène of Bong's film recalls history (e.g., the pro-democracy demonstrations of the 1980s), while also being grounded in the contemporary moment (e.g., the monster's origin is based upon a recent controversy at an American military base in Seoul). *The Host's* simultaneous utilization of and derivation from Hollywood generic conventions demonstrates the power of American influence in Korea and the anxiety over being overwhelmed by that same influence. Genre, narrative, and style all function to reveal the ambivalence of inverted exile. In order to see this in *The Host*, let us return to the scene of the monster's first appearance.

Inverted exile in *The Host*

After spending time with the safe woman on the monorail, the film returns to the chaos below as several people pile into a small trailer, following one another into a confined space. The monster pursues and slaughters several of those inside. Park Gang-du and an American free the survivors and spend the remainder of the scene combatting the creature with improvised weapons like signposts. Gang-du wounds the monster as it attacks the American. The ambivalences of inverted exile can be seen in the interaction between the American and Gang-du. Their initial interactions, during which the American barks commands in English, reflect the unequal relationship between the United States and South Korea. However, as the battle ensues, they begin to function as partners, as Gang-du takes up a more active role and the American speaks Korean—suggesting that a more equal partnership between South Korea and the United States is possible if Korea takes initiative.

Later in the film, it is revealed that the American is a soldier stationed in South Korea. The presence of American military forces in South Korea has always been considered one of the drawbacks of South Korea's relationship with the United States. Decades of military presence in South Korea are recalled by the inclusion of this soldier. America's military presence in Korea marks the United States as the dominant member of the political and economic relationship between the two nations. However, the soldier's presence is an ambivalent one, complicating the common reading of *The Host* as anti-American. While the Koreans all flee, the American is the first person in the scene to stand up and try to defend Korean lives from the creature. The American is not merely part of an occupying force as he seems to care more for Korean lives than other Koreans. He sacrifices his life to defend Korea. Korea's passivity in its relation to the West is critiqued as the American is the only one who steps up to defend Koreans. The American's masculine and active role reflects the United States' place as the dominant power in its relationship with South Korea.

When Gang-du begins to assist the American, the American immediately takes the dominant role in the relationship—barking orders at Gang-du in English. The American's disinterest in using the language of the country that hosts him reflects the unequal partnership between the United States and South Korea. However, ambivalence returns when the two men move to attack the monster. The American hurls a stone at the monster while Gang-du attempts to lift a sign post. Now the power dynamic between the two men shifts. The American follows the idea of the Korean by helping him with the sign post. He still barks orders at Gang-du, though now they are in Korean. They launch a successful attack on the creature—the success of their actions suggests a reevaluation of

the neocolonial relationship between the two nations. Rather than simply accepting or dismissing the leadership of the United States, Korea can take an active role in creating a partnership with America. Such a partnership would acknowledge the ambivalence of Western influence and work towards alleviating anxieties surrounding American exploitation of Korea. As the monster attacks the American, Gang-du is able to muster an attack on his own. Life in inverted exile requires a renegotiation of South Korea's role as America's underling. Bong's films suggests that rather than simply following the leadership of the West or demonizing it as other, South Korea needs to embrace the ambivalence of its relationship with the United States and take an active role in shaping it. This partnership would acknowledge the important role the United States plays as an economic and military ally while also keeping a critical eye toward political manipulation that solely benefits American businesses (e.g. changes to quota systems and import laws that allowed Hollywood to dominate Korean theaters).

The scholarly dialogue

The scholarly attention that New Korean Cinema, Bong Joon-ho, and *The Host* have received does not adequately reflect the ambivalence of inverted exile or its importance to contemporary Korean identity. These scholars isolate their concerns from some of the issues addressed by the others (e.g., some solely discuss marketing, while others take on history). Voices within *The Host* are left out, and the ambivalences of contemporary Korean identity are not adequately explored. I put historical, political, and aesthetic concerns into dialogue with one another, allowing both the anxieties and desires wrapped up in *The Host* and the New Korean context to emerge. By introducing aesthetic

dialogue and inverted exile into the conversation surrounding *The Host* I explore its cultural significance by embracing ambivalence at all of the film's levels.

Cultural historians like Michael Robinson and Darcy Paquet provide invaluable information regarding the context surrounding New Korean films. While the efforts of these cultural historians do reveal ambivalence in Korean history, they do not make conclusions concerning the significance of this ambivalence for Korean identity. Robinson and Paquet describe a changing nation and industry in which the United States plays a prominent role as both benefactor and bully. Hollywood, as a culturally imperialist force with which to be reckoned, serves as both a source of inspiration and boogeyman for contemporary Korean films and the films of Korean cinema's "Golden Age" (a period from the early 1950s to the late 1960s). Production companies pushed for legislation that allowed for Hollywood's utter domination in the market for decades. By punctuating the story of South Korea's American-backed "progress" with tales of woes caused by American political pressure, historians like Robinson and Paquet demonstrate some of the ambivalence of contemporary South Korean life, but ultimately, do not comment on how this ambivalence shapes Korean identity. For example, Robinson tells us that the political and economic changes that have shaped South Korea have altered the values of Korean society but does not explicate the effects this has had on the lives of Koreans: "The astounding growth rates brought equally dramatic changes in Korean society. General living patterns, work-places, family structure and social values were all transformed by the rapid structural change that accompanied this growth" (23). I, however, describe *The Host* as symptomatic of these changes and discuss how its dialogic aesthetics suggest ways to critically adjust to the anxieties and desires of inverted exile.

While cultural historians do not make conclusions concerning the effects of ambivalence on Korean identity, there are scholars that do not acknowledge ambivalence at all. Scholars frequently take up political and economic issues in their discussions of *The Host*, but they will often ignore Korean liability with regard to these issues and the aesthetic interactions of cultures in *The Host*. Hsuan L. Hsu describes *The Host* as a messy concoction of various media forms mobilized towards a critique of the neoliberal reforms that have drastically (and according to Hsu, negatively) altered contemporary Korean life. According to Hsu, “Neoliberalism has transformed Korean citizens into ‘disposable people.’” Hsu’s reading of *The Host* as anti-American only addresses the negative effects of South Korea’s relationship with the United States. For the most part, he does not address the interaction of aesthetic voices within *The Host* that would bring to light how the film characterizes Korean life and South Korea’s relationship with the United States as ambivalent.

Indeed, *The Host* is a dialogue at all levels, including marketing. Though Nikki J. Y. Lee’s article, “Localized Globalization and a Monster National: *The Host* and the South Korean Film Industry,” seems to embrace ambivalence, its narrow focus does not allow for an adequate exploration of what I call inverted exile. While Korean blockbusters clearly utilize the stylistic and generic forms of their Hollywood counterparts, they are marketed in opposition to them: “The Korean blockbuster strives to emulate Hollywood while also demonizing it by casting it in the role of Other” (46). Those who choose to see Korean blockbusters in theaters instead of Hollywood ones are coded as patriots. This push and pull between accepting American influence and pushing against American domination shapes the role of South Koreans as producers and

consumers of cinema and reflects the ambivalence I wish to analyze, but only does so in regard to one aspect of *The Host*. Looking at Bong's films as the aesthetic dialogues of inverted exile acknowledges the multiple (and ambivalent) cultural points of view within his films and contemporary Korean life. My approach takes on the aesthetic and narrative concerns that Lee does not.

Often the ambivalence of Korean blockbusters is ignored as scholars, like Christina Klein, focus solely on the appropriation on American culture and not the simultaneous pushing away of the very same cultural influences. Klein addresses the interaction of global Hollywood and local cinematic forms within Bong's oeuvre in her article "Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, or, Transnational Genres in the Films of Bong Joon-ho." Throughout her discussion of *The Host*, Klein contrasts Bong's critique of American foreign policy with his excitement for Hollywood films while focusing on how the film's characters struggle to maintain their Korean identity in the face of their Westernized nation. Her reading of *The Host* as ambivalent falls apart, however, when she interprets the film's final scene as reinstating the prominence of all things Korean—a reading with which I do not agree. The Park home at the end of *The Host* is still shaped by inverted exile—Gang-du remains a single parent and his domestic space still functions as a business. His home-cooked Korean meal for his newly adopted son allows Korean traditions to co-mingle with Western capital—not usurp it.

Klein also makes a move towards larger claims about what is "authentically" Korean in these films when she puts Bong in dialogue with the Golden Age films of the 1950s and 60s: "In noticing the similarities between Bong's films and these earlier

masterpieces of Korean filmmaking, we can see how appropriating from Hollywood and other national cinemas has long been a feature of “‘authentic’ commercial Korean cinema” (873). Again, Klein simplifies the issue, focusing merely on Korea’s adoption of outside cultural influences, forgetting its simultaneous denigrating of the same culture. Her appeals to “authenticity” do not reflect the ambivalence of contemporary South Korea. If appropriating American culture is “authentically” Korean, then Korean culture would not be distinct from American culture at all. By focusing on the ambivalence of what I am calling inverted exile and approaching *The Host* as an aesthetic dialogue, I do not lose sight of the anxieties and pleasures bound up in South Korea’s relationship with the West.

Rather than cutting myself off from the conversation surrounding *The Host* by focusing only on a single aspect of the film, my project embraces ambivalence at the levels of genre, narrative, and style. This approach brings scholars like Klein and Hsu into dialogue with one another and the voices emanating from the film. By accepting ambivalence and analyzing *The Host* as an aesthetic dialogue, I wish to more adequately engage how Korea’s most popular film speaks to the cultural moment and embraces the ambivalences of life in inverted exile.

Sites of dialogue

Each of the three chapters of my project takes up a site of cultural dialogue integral to *The Host* as its central topic: the monster, the city, and the home. Organized as concentric circles, each of these chapters delves into more individualized concerns of life in inverted exile. The monster embodies South Korea’s neocolonial relationship with the United States and the changing cultural values of inverted exile. Meanwhile, the city

reveals the state's efforts to control space and bodies that are grounded in places like hospitals and skyscrapers. The final chapter is concerned with a smaller site: the home. This chapter addresses the struggles of individual families and people to adjust to the changes of inverted exile (e.g., increased divorce rates, rampant consumerism and individualism, et cetera).

In addition, each chapter is concerned with genre and gender linked to its cultural site. The monster chapter deals with monster movies and how *The Host's* monster inverts the tropes of the masculine monster (e.g. *King Kong*, 1933) by coding its creature as feminine. These generic inversions express the ambivalence (inverted exile) behind South Korea's economic success by recovering Korea's repressed femininity. Though *The Host* is a monster movie, it features an epidemic subplot and many aspects of its style are reminiscent of film noir. Both epidemic films and films noir are linked to the city and aid in discussing the city as a site of failed masculine power in *The Host*. The final chapter focuses on the home and the genre most associated with domestic spaces: melodrama. Rather than simply dealing with the home and melodrama as feminine realms, I suggest that *The Host* posits that a plastic blend of masculinity and femininity is preferable for life in inverted exile.

My first chapter—"The Monster on the Han River: Inverted exile and the Inverted Monster"—takes Bong Joon-ho's monster as its site of cultural dialogue. Bong inverts the conventions of the American and Japanese monster genres to birth a feminized monster that preys on both the anxieties and desires of contemporary South Korea. His monster fosters a dialogue between the contemporary moment and the past few decades

of Korean history (e.g., dictatorships following World War II and 1980s activism) to reveal the buried ambivalence of the “miracle on the Han River.”

As I have suggested, the city is the topic of the second chapter—“Skyscrapers and Deep Wounds: The New Korean City and the Crimes of Past and Present.” Seoul has developed into an ultra-modern metropolis—a masculine space of commerce and cultural interaction that sharply contrasts with South Korea’s rural past which is ever-present and coded as feminine in Bong’s films. Both the rural past and urban present inhabit the same space in inverted exilic films, creating a dialogue between the two that shatters the façade of progress—highlighting the states failures and its feminized role in its relationship with the United States. The epidemic plot and noir stylistics of *The Host* engage the failures of the South Korean state’s attempts at masculine control over space and time, suggesting that embracing these failures and acknowledging inverted exile would be preferable than continued attempts at control.

Finally, the third chapter—“The Feminine Patriarch: Domestic Life in Inverted Exile”—addresses the drastic changes in South Korean family life and domestic spaces. As this chapter’s title suggests, *The Host* engages changes in gender roles in Korean homes. Bong’s melodramatic emphasis on domestic mise-en-scène in his films calls attention to individual attitudes towards inverted exile. For example, in *Mother*, the titular character refuses to adjust to her role as a single mother as she clings to tradition and refuses to embrace any change. Borrowing from Julia Kristeva, I suggest that, in *The Host*, Bong posits a “cathartic rebirth,” working “with and against” the dialogue between outside cultural influence and traditional Korean values.

Following the three chapters, a short conclusion—“Beyond *The Host*: Inverted exile and the Cinema of Change”—discusses the value of my project and possible avenues of further study. The approach to addressing Bong’s films developed here can prove valuable for addressing not only New Korean Cinema as a whole, but also the entire Korean Wave phenomenon. It can also be used to unearth buried histories of inverted exile in other local cinemas at times of accelerated “progress,” including Weimar Germany and even contemporary China.

The Monster on the Han River: Inverted Exile and the Feminine Monster

As *The Host*'s monster in emerges from the depths of the Han River, it brings with it the buried ambivalence of life in contemporary South Korea. A monster is the perfect vehicle for this ambivalence as the cinematic monster has always been a site of ambivalence and cultural dialogue. The ambivalence hidden beneath the economic prosperity of South Korea constitutes *inverted exile*—a situation in which a country has drastically changed around its population, causing new values to usurp traditional ones. South Korea's "development" has brought with it economic opportunities and personal freedoms but has also broken up families and replaced agrarian ways of life. Taking inspiration from Mikhail Bakhtin, I read *The Host* as an *aesthetic dialogue* that brings the anxieties and desires of a first-world Korea into contact with those associated with waning traditional values. The monster in *The Host* is a major site of this dialogue where the ambivalence of inverted exile is revealed. By revealing this ambivalence, *The Host* functions as a warning against both total acceptance of western influence on Korea and forgetting the past. The word "monster" is derived from the Latin "monēre," meaning "warning." As such, Bong's monster is an appropriate figure for bringing out the ambivalence of inverted exile buried beneath South Korea's story of "progress" in a film that serves as a cultural warning.

The Host is one of South Korea's few monster movies; the monster movie subgenre is typically associated with the United States and Japan—both countries that

have had ambivalent political relationships with South Korea for decades. Japan controlled the Korean peninsula as a colony from 1910 to 1945 and the United States has had a neocolonial relationship with South Korea since its separation from the North after the Second World War. Since then, South Korea's rapid transformation into an industrial, first-world economic powerhouse (under the influence of the United States) has earned South Korea's capital, Seoul, the nickname "the miracle on the Han River." This nickname refers to the city's and country's rise to global economic power and the fact that the Han River runs through Seoul.

The Host borrows from the monster movie subgenre in order to reveal the ambivalence hidden behind a national success perceived by the state, much of the South Korean population, and the world community. Kong and Godzilla, classic monsters from the United States and Japan, were violently birthed during times of change and crisis for their respective motherlands. Their respective films work to address the ambivalences of perceived national failures. *King Kong* (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1933) was released during the Great Depression and *Gojira* (Ishiro Honda, 1954) during the post-World War II occupation of Japan by the United States. Kong is a spectacle of masculine prowess, inciting desire at a time when the masculine public sphere has failed, while Godzilla is a Japanese spectacle of power during a period of occupation after defeat in World War II. Bong's film inverts convention by coding its monster feminine. The monster's origin, body, choice of landmark with which to interact, and its role as mother set it apart from its international predecessors. Bong's monster's femininity is central to my argument as it uncovers a repressed femininity that reveals South Korea's subordinate role in its relationship to the United States and an absence of mothers as familial unity crumbles in

inverted exile. I argue that with these returns, *The Host* encourages a return of unity and criticality that embraces critical ambivalence.

Cinematic monsters, like the one in *The Host*, are spectacles whose bodies both attract and repulse the spectator. They illicit horror and suspense but are also the products of special effects that wow the audience. The body of the cinematic monster is typically gendered masculine. Its massive stature and physical prowess are sources of spectacle and anxiety. I have observed that a monster's body is often linked to certain spaces (landmarks) and times (multiple historical moments). While Bong's monster is a visual spectacle, it inverts the tropes of the monster movie to better address the ambivalences of inverted exile. The monster's feminized body and relatively small size are marked inversions of its predecessors (e.g., Kong and Godzilla). Monsters often interact with landmarks that are linked to both its gender and cultural context. King Kong climbs *up* the Empire State Building, a giant phallus of modernity, to prey on the failures of capitalism during the Great Depression. Meanwhile, Bong's monster dwells *beneath* the Han River (a national landmark of great historical importance) and the Wonhyo bridge (built in the 1980s by an oppressive dictator) to reveal the ambivalence of perceived national success. Monsters are often linked to both the contemporary moment and an event from the past that gets infused with myth. Godzilla arises from a diegetic legend to rain atomic fury on Tokyo—recalling the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan at the end of World War II. Again the *The Host* inverts convention as its monster is linked to historical moments that are not laced with myth. Its origin is tied to the recent controversy of the McFarland incident (in which a mortician at an American military base in Seoul illegally dumped gallons of formaldehyde into the Han) and its actions

throughout the film link the monster to changes of last three decades of South Korean history.

As an *aesthetic dialogue*, *The Host* inverts the conventions of its monster movie predecessors to code its monster as feminine and maternal. In doing so, I argue, the film uncovers the ambivalence of perceived national success to suggest a need to return to attitudes of unity and criticality.

Origins

The monster in *The Host* is provided an on-screen origin that references a real-life event that called attention to the unequal division of power between the United States and South Korea. *The Host* begins in long shot in the morgue of an American military base in Korea. Mr. Kim and an unnamed, older American man stand on opposite ends of the frame—Kim on the right (East) and the American on the left (West), suggesting an East-West divide. In a condescending tone, and in English, the American commands Kim to pour several bottles of formaldehyde down the drain simply because they are dusty. Mr. Kim meekly protests, pointing out that the drain leads to the Han River (a major source of drinking water for many South Koreans). Kim gives in rather than lose his job—suggesting Korean culpability and a desire to continue participating in Korea's vaunted economic success.

South Korean audiences would be completely aware of the event recreated in this opening scene. In February 2000, Albert McFarland, a mortician employed by the United States Forces at an Army base in Seoul, ordered his staff to pour about a hundred liters of embalming fluid down a drain that empties into the Han River. McFarland's actions not only violated environmental regulations set forth by the United States military, but also

became a major news story in Korea. His light punishment by the United States incited protests by Korean activists (Hsu). The audience's recognition of the event being reenacted and the identity of the unnamed American man in the scene, immediately recalls recent outrage over American dominance over South Korea. As a recent event, the invocation of the McFarland Incident speaks to the lived experience of spectators that demonstrates the ambivalence of inverted exile.

Unlike its predecessors, Bong diegetically grounds his monster's origin in a concrete historical event. Before Bong's monster emerged to take on inverted exile, Kong engaged the Great Depression, and Godzilla terrorized an American-occupied Japan after its loss in World War II. Kong's and Godzilla's origins are linked to lived history but are infused with myth. In *King Kong*, Kong has existed long before the start of the film's story. He lived on Skull Island, a fictional island filled with exotic and dangerous natives and monsters galore. The primitive fantasies of Kong and Skull Island are attractive in the context of the Great Depression because they transport the audience away from anxieties of capitalism and modernity. However, Kong's links to slavery (his resemblance to black stereotypes and his capture by whites) tie him to real-life events and the anxieties of the drive to succeed in a capitalist system. Meanwhile, in *Gojira*, Godzilla's existence is linked to a diegetically "authentic" Japanese legend for thousands of years. The fantasy offered by this legend would seem attractive as an appeal to cultural authenticity at a time when the American occupation of Japan was westernizing the country. Moreover, because Godzilla is awakened by atomic testing off of the coast of Japan, the film evokes the anxieties over similar tests in the region and the dropping of the atomic bombs by the United States, which was then occupying Japan.

However, the Korean monster's origins dwell solely the recently lived history of its spectators to call attention to the unequal terms of South Korea's relationship to the United States. By grounding the monster's origin in contemporary events, *The Host* makes the ambivalences of inverted exile immediately and explicitly available to spectators. Rather than utilize a myth to alleviate anxiety, Bong's film utilizes real-life anxieties to make ambivalent perceived national success. *The Host's* monster has two origins. While its diegetic origin reveals anxiety concerning South Korea's relationship with the United States, its production origin conjures desirable aspects of Korean and American cooperation.

Much of *The Host's* budget was allocated towards commissioning an animation company in San Francisco to animate the computer-generated monster. There are no firms in Korea capable of providing computer-generated animation with the high-production values desired by Bong. Anxiety *and* desire are bound up in the monster's production. Through cooperation, the United States and South Korea are able to create a desirable spectacle for Koreans. However, the need to seek American assistance demonstrates Korean dependence on the United States. This technological dependence on America is also demonstrated in Bong's 2002 film, *Memories of Murder*, in which the film's detectives must send DNA evidence to America because they do not have the technology to analyze the samples collected. Though *The Host* is a Korean blockbuster, only possible through the recent political reforms and economic successes of South Korea, the ambivalence of inverted exile is demonstrated through continued reliance on the United States. Immediately, in the monster's origins, the film is creating a dialogue between contemporary events, anti-American sentiment in Korea, Korean dependence on

American economic and technological superiority, and the combination of desire and anxiety present in Korean individuals in regard to American capital.

The monster's gendered body

What matter of beast is *The Host's* monster? The monster is *heteroglot*, to borrow a term from Bakhtin. It is multiple—a convergence of *polyglossia* (existence of multiple “languages” within a text or cultural system) and *heteroglossia* (interaction of internal and external forces within a single utterance) through which meaning proliferates. This multiplicity fosters the ambivalence that characterizes the monster. It looks like an amalgam of creatures, is a mother and killer of Koreans, and is born in South Korea's womb from the seed of the United States. As such, Bong's monster preys on anxieties, but also incites desire. The return of Korea's troubled history as a result of Bong's monster creates anxiety as it destabilizes the illusion of “progress” surrounding South Korea's emergence as a global economic power. However, it also rouses desire for what has been lost. Bong's monster is not only feminine, but also a mother. It is the only mother in *The Host*, a symptom of the changing values of South Korea. Divorce rates have increased and familial unity has crumbled in a Westernized Korea. The monster's role as mother plays on the desire for what has been lost while inducing anxiety as a mortal threat. This play between anxiety and desire makes the monster both attractive and repulsive.

I argue that Bong's film inverts monster movie conventions to code its monster as feminine. The monster recalls femininity repressed by other monster movies and South Korea's vaunted success in the masculine public sphere. In the introduction to her book, *Monstrous Imagination*, Marie-Helene Huet describes ancient monsters as blurring “the

difference between genres” and as holding “false resemblance” to other creatures (86). Bong’s monster seems to have some fish-like qualities, and looks somewhat like a squid. It is amphibious and swings under Wonhyo Bridge by its tail. This monstrous body produced through the marriage of South Korea and America and shaped by Korean imagination differs greatly from the cinematic monsters that predated it. Kong and Godzilla are anthropomorphized. They both walk upright, Kong is a primate like us, and it is clear that Godzilla is a man in a rubber suit. I would have to go to great imaginative lengths to describe anything in the appearance of Bong’s monster as resembling human beings in any manner. Also unlike Kong and Godzilla, *The Host*’s monster does not have a name. While names can be gendered male or female, a family name is passed on from a father to his offspring and so names are associated with masculinity. Not only do the classic examples of movie monsters resemble humans in some manner, but they are also typically masculine and physically masterful. Bong’s creation inverts these traits. Kong masterfully scales buildings and desires sex with blonde white women. It/he personifies masculine black stereotypes of physical prowess and unchecked sexual desire. Godzilla’s gait cannot be slowed by tanks or nuclear bombs, but this Korean monster does not possess such physical prowess. In its initial emergence from the Han River, the monster slips. Even gunshots from pistols seem to hurt Bong’s monster. The most obvious physical inversion is the size of Bong’s monster. It is slightly bigger than a large SUV, quite unlike the gargantuan beasts of American and Japanese monster movies. Its small size, clumsiness, and physical otherness are all inversions of monster movie conventions and function to code *The Host*’s monster as feminine.

The monster's origins confirm South Korea's subordination to the United States. If this neocolonial relationship were described as a hetero-normative couple, South Korea would have the feminized role, given that dominance is associated with masculinity. The embalming chemicals poured into the Han River came from an American military base and as such are linked to the masculine. America's seed is implanted into South Korea's womb, the Han River (it even resembles a vagina on maps), and the offspring produced is the monster. According to Huet, ancient monsters were associated with the feminine imagination. The imagination of the impregnated mother could distort her offspring into something monstrous. Monsters were a product of imagination and thus products of art. In the 19th century, the monster became linked to the masculine (84-89). Monsters became offspring of male scientists, suggesting a link to the emphasis placed on science and the masculine public sphere with the shift to modernity. In the case of *The Host*, America is the father and Korea the mother. And as an element in a Korean text, the monster is a product of the Korean imagination, recalling an earlier figuration of the monstrous that places emphasis on the feminine, but is also linked to modernity and a masculine United States. I claim that within the monster's body are both a feminized past and modernity, not unlike a South Korea coping with inverted exile.

Within its nest in the sewers beneath the Wonhyo Bridge, the monster expels its victims, living and dead, through its vaginal mouth. It gives birth and has a domestic space that it shares with its "children." Not only is Bong's monster feminine, but it is also a mother. Its role as mother is central to its ambivalence. In the face of a changing Korea, traditional familial values have suffered. Divorce rates have risen. Consumerism has placed emphasis on individualism, pulling Koreans away from familial concerns. As a

mother, the monster congers these anxieties while also becoming a source of desire; it becomes attractive by filling the void left by a lack of mothers in the film. This void is symptomatic of the focus on individualism and consumerism and the loss of traditional familial unity that has made Korean homes less nurturing. The film's protagonists, the Parks, are a family without mothers. Park Gang-du (Song Kang-ho) and his siblings grew up without their mother and Hyun-seo's mother abandoned her and Gang-du shortly after giving birth. The monster fulfills the vacant role of mother in the film to transform familial roles and invoke a critical unity. According to Kim Kyung Hyun, a lack of mothers is not unique to Bong's film, and so his monster fills a void felt throughout New Korean Cinema:

That mothers are cast to the periphery in many of these films is hardly surprising given that frenzied postwar urbanization had seriously altered familial relations to a point where 'mothers,' in their traditionally represented form, gradually disappeared from contemporary-milieu fictions (Kim, 6).

Traditional family values have been strained by Korea's rapid transformation, becoming a major source of anxiety. The anxiety over waning traditional values, the desire for mothers, and a bulk of contemporary Korean fiction are all voices emanating from Bong's monster's feminized body.

As a mother, the monster has a domestic space, a nest within the sewers beneath the Wonhyo Bridge to which it brings the Koreans it swallows. The monster expels the corpses through its vaginal mouth: stillbirths. These "stillbirths" reek of ambivalence. At the moment of its "delivery" of a corpse, the monster fulfills the dual role of anxiety inducing monster that preys on Koreans and desirable mother. As a product of the

turbulent relationship between South Korea and the United States, the monster can be said to be fulfilling the same roles as the political relationship that produced it. This relationship has, in a sense, “raised” South Korea from a third-world, agrarian nation into a first-world, industrial one—like a mother. Simultaneously, the relationship between the two nations has been monstrous, leading to the deaths of Koreans through the Korean War, Korea’s participation in the War on Terror, and the deaths of Korean activists prior to the 1990s.

Not all of the monster’s “births” are corpses. Park Hyun-seo (played by Ko Ah-sung), the young daughter of the film’s protagonist, is alive when ejected by the monster; she becomes the monster’s first successful birth. Orphan Se-joo is later birthed by the monster as well. Hyun-seo, who has never known her own mother or grandmother, begins to function as a mother, taking care of Se-joo in the sewers. Through the monster’s influence Hyun-seo has learned to nurture, as does her father, Gang-du. As I discuss in chapter three of this project, Gang-du takes on a more feminized and nurturing role by the end of the film. Again, the monster is not simply monstrous as it provides a somewhat nurturing environment within its nest in the sewers of the Wonhyo Bridge. It provides a more nurturing environment than the initial figuration of the motherless Park home. Wrapped up in the monster are ambivalences of past and present. The lost traditional mother figure and a contemporary outrage (the McFarland Incident) are both conjured in the body of something monstrous. By unearthing a repressed past and emphasizing South Korea’s subordinate role in its relationship with the United States through a body that is both monstrous and feminine, I argue that *The Host* posits a return

of unity and criticality that embraces the ambivalence of both a Westernized South Korea and traditional Korean culture.

Gendered landmarks

Bong Joon-ho's choice of landmarks illustrates the dialogic nature of *The Host*. Voices of hundreds of years of Korean history, the fear of the North and desire for reunification with it, and the rhetoric of the Han as a symbol of progress all emanate from the Han River. Wonkyo bridge brings associations of student protests, oppressive dictatorships, and American-backed industrial growth. Having the McFarland incident of 2000 serve as the monster's origin recalls a recent reminder of the unjust balance of power between the United States and South Korea. This cacophonous dialogue of ambivalent voices manages to undermine the story of success and "progress" associated with contemporary South Korea as the Miracle on the Han River. The monster's interaction with these landmarks complicates this dialogue through inversions of monster movie conventions, like coding the monster as feminine

Bong's monster was birthed in a Korean river of historical significance from the seed of the United States. The Han River becomes a womb and remains the monster's stomping grounds. It makes its nest in dark, moist, and cavernous sewers below the Wonhyo Bridge that evoke female reproductive organs. *The Host's* landmarks further place its monster in the realm of the female. A monster movie trope established by films like *King Kong* is the inclusion of a specific landmark or landmarks with which the monster interacts. The landmark(s) usually have an ambivalent relationship to the contemporary moment (e.g., the recently constructed Empire State Building as a symbol of industrial capitalism during the Great Depression in *King Kong*). Typically, the

monster's choice of landmark and interaction with it further its alignment with masculinity. *The Host* plays with these conventions to code its monster as feminine, inverting traditional monster tropes in order to uncover ambivalence that is not immediately evident within the New Korean context.

Bong's choice of landmarks emphasizes the voice of history that has been repressed in favor of reveling in South Korea's "progress." The Han River has been of military and economic importance throughout Korean history. It passes through Seoul, the "miracle on the Han River," harboring anxiety inducing history *beneath* its reflective surface. The Wonhyo Bridge, in which the monster makes her nest, was constructed during the regime of a particularly brutal dictator, Chun Doo-hwan, and was completed in 1981. Pro-democracy activism and American-supported government violence reached its apex under Chun's rule. The bridge recalls particularly sour memories of South Korea's relationship with the United States and the push towards democracy. Ambivalence towards the New Korean context is revealed through these feminized landmarks, undermining a story of national success. By contrast, Kong and Godzilla interact with masculine symbols of power and success to deal with national failures.

Kong ascends the Empire State Building with love interest/sex object Ann Darrow (Fay Wray) in tow during the climax of *King Kong*. The Empire State Building's construction was completed in 1931, and it was then the tallest building in the world—a giant phallus proclaiming America's industrial might. According to Merrill Schleier, Kong's scaling of the Empire State Building visually links him to the workers who built the edifice:

Cooper's decision to place Kong at the skyscraper's crest was not only prompted by their antagonism or by the sound of an airplane, but also by the appearance of numerous construction workers during the building boom, high atop steel scaffolds, who were lauded in the popular press for their courage, athletic skill, and masculine prowess, creating a virtual entertainment spectacle (Schleier).

At the time, laborers were desirable symbols of masculinity and linked to ambivalent attitudes regarding American capitalism. Their image was utilized to promote capitalist industrial modernity as well as to subvert it through use of the worker as a symbol of the communist party. Likewise, Kong is the ultimate masculine figure and preys upon Depression-era anxiety. His primitive masculinity surpasses the modern masculinity of the construction workers as Kong dominates capitalist America's phallus, the prime symbol of industrial and economic success. Kong's masculinity becomes dangerous as his out-of-control libido puts Ann Darrow in danger. The airplanes that eventually kill him, symbols of masculine supremacy over nature and industrial and military might, reestablish American dominance and the status quo.

Kong's domination of a landmark linked with modernity preys on the anxieties induced by the Great Depression, though America's industrial might, in the form of fighter planes, is able to reestablish order. Similarly, Godzilla's atomic fury in his prolific film franchise addresses the anxieties surrounding Japan's own atomic destruction in World War II. Though not featured in 1954's *Gojira* (as its construction was not completed until 1958), Tokyo Tower has become the industrial phallus to be dominated in numerous *kaiju* (the Japanese monster movie genre) films, including subsequent Godzilla movies. (Even King Kong has been there in the Japanese sequels.) Tokyo

Tower is an orange, Eiffel Tower-inspired structure in the center of Tokyo. The tower is the second-largest artificial structure in Japan and primarily functions as a broadcasting antenna and tourist attraction. It is a symbol of the industrial and economic success of post-World War II Japan—achieved in cooperation with the United States who defeated Japan in the war. Godzilla and his fellow *kaiju* feed on the anxieties linked to these successes. Tokyo Tower, though a symbol of economic success, is linked to the failure of the war, the deaths of millions of Japanese, and the subordination of Japan to the United States during the occupation following World War II. Godzilla's massive size and ability to utterly decimate Japan's capital and its flamboyant orange phallus grant him masculine prowess similar to King Kong.

Bong's monster chooses less flamboyant landmarks with which to reveal the ambivalence of inverted exile hidden beneath the shiny visage of Seoul. The Han River is a site with a long and tumultuous history for Koreans. Its utilization as a setting for *The Host* encourages an ambivalent relationship with the past that prevents idyllic nostalgia. The Wonhyo Bridge has a much shorter history but is equally steeped in ambivalence. Its associations with brutal dictator Chun and activism of the 1980s demonstrate the ambivalence of the past few decades of Westernization in South Korea. The monster's interactions with these landmarks differ greatly from Kong's and Godzilla's dominating of phallic structures. In *The Host*, the monster inhabits these sites of ambivalence, aligning them with the feminine. By inhabiting ambivalence spaces, the monster embraces and works *with* ambivalence, rather than attempting to dominate and work *against* it. Masculine monsters exert mastery over ambivalence and are put down to reestablish the control of the state—the ambivalence is never embraced. I argue that *The*

Host utilizes femininity to foster attitudes of unity and criticality through co-habitation with ambivalence rather than domination.

The Han River has served as a site of cultural exchange and ambivalence for centuries. It was used as a trade route to China for years, cementing its strategic importance for any battle on the Korean peninsula. Long-time use as a trade route gave the Han a reputation for being extremely polluted. Recently, the Korean government has made great efforts to clean the Han and use it as a symbol of ecological responsibility, banning navigation of the river in the process. Bong's evocation of the McFarland incident at the onset of the film not only illustrates the turbulent relationship between Korea and America, but also interacts with the Han's history as a polluted water way and the recent efforts to repair that damage. Though touted as a symbol of progress, the Han is actually a site of ambivalence.

Originating in North Korea and passing through the southern capital of Seoul, the Han is a constant reminder of the pain of Korean division (caused by the West) and the perceived threat from the North. South Korea functions in a constant state of readiness for attack from North Korea. In what is now called the 1986 Water Panic, the Han River was a central figure of anxiety. Some feared that the North could attack Seoul by releasing a flood from the upstream dam on the Northern side of the river. This nefarious scheme was never perpetrated, demonstrating that the fear was grounded in paranoia. The return of the repressed horrors of the Korean War incites paranoia over threats from the North. Similarly, in *The Host*, the South Korean and American governments believe the monster to be the source of a virus that endangers the citizenry of Seoul. The area surrounding the river is quarantined and the virus is perceived as the true threat rather

than the monster. There is no virus—again the Han becomes a site of paranoid fear that provokes efforts of state control that do not benefit Koreans.

The Wonhyo Bridge in which the monster makes its nest holds ties to more recent traumas on South Korea's road to first-world status. As stated earlier, the bridge was completed during the reign of brutal dictator Chun in 1981. It serves as the site of a massive protest during *The Host's* climax, linking it to the pro-democracy and anti-American protests of the 1980s following the Gwangju massacre—an incident in which Chun's government slaughtered more than a hundred protestors with the support of the Reagan administration. Wonhyo Bridge was the product of an American-backed dictator pushing to modernize South Korea and has associations with industrial and economic growth as well as masculine dominance over nature. Rather than climb on top of this landmark as Kong or Godzilla would, Bong's monster inhabits the damp, cavernous sewers below the bridge. The monster nests in these sewers, making a feminized domestic space within this industrial structure. Other monsters dominate structures linked to the woes of their homelands, but Bong's creature embraces ambivalence by residing within its ambivalent landmarks. Kong's and Godzilla's masculinity causes them to dominate ambivalence while the monster in *The Host* lives *with* ambivalence. Its maternal traits do not allow the monster to dominate landmarks just as South Korea's feminized role in its relationship with the United States will never allow for Korean domination over the West. I argue that the monster's relationship with its landmarks suggests Koreans and their state should learn to live *with* the ambivalence of Western influence rather than be dominated by it.

The cacophonous, climatic dialogue of *The Host*

The Host's climax exemplifies how *aesthetic dialogues* function to put past and present into dialogue to uncover the critically ambivalent reality of the New Korean context. Bong's monster incites a cacophonous mix of voices that bring to light many of the stakes of inverted exile. The Park family has separated following the death of Gang-du's father. After the film spends time with each member of the Park family individually, they converge on Wonhyo Bridge to attempt to rescue Hyun-seo. The family is reunited in the domestic space of the film's only mother. Simultaneously, the Korean government prepares to kill the imagined virus with "Agent Yellow," a fictional weapon created by the United States for utilization in the War on Terror. A protest forms at the site where Agent Yellow is to be implemented, right next to the Wonhyo Bridge. As the monster emerges, most of the activists and the police deployed to control them flee. The Parks arrive and, with assistance from a homeless man, battle the monster. Hyun-seo is recovered from the monster's mouth, now dead, but Se-joo survives. Each member of the family attacks the monster until Gang-du issues the final blow, impaling the monster's mouth with a pole.

Hollywood's presence is felt throughout the scene. *The Host*'s utilization of Hollywood generic and stylistic conventions marks it as a commercial product. However, its inversion of monster movie tropes and its subversion of Hollywood narrative convention (e.g., the early reveal of the monster and the death of Hyun-seo) demonstrate that Bong's film does not merely mimic Hollywood, but also has a critical relationship with it. The stylistic voice of Hollywood is present throughout the scene as it begins with an establishing shot of the Wonhyo bridge area before cutting to a medium shot of one of

the protagonists, Park Nam-il (Park Hae-il). Cutting speed increases as the scene moves towards the climactic battle—as it would in a Hollywood action film. The battle itself is shot in slow motion, again a common Hollywood action trope. By adhering to Hollywood conventions, the film stands as a commercial product aligned with capitalism and America’s cultural imperialism—demonstrating America’s tremendous influence on Korea. Hollywood’s influence has directly contributed to the international success of New Korean Cinema, Bong, and *The Host*. However, the film’s ambivalence to Hollywood is revealed through the inversions of its monster and a few stylistic and narrative subversions of the Hollywood norm. These derivations from Hollywood convention allow the film to lay bare the ambivalences of inverted exile as mere mimicry or rejection of the West would not allow.

The derivations from Hollywood convention continue into the final battle with the monster as the slow-motion action visuals are accompanied by a somber violin score. The violin score during the battle is similar to the music one would hear when a Hollywood film wants you to feel sad about something. It is not music that gets your blood pumping for a kick-ass action spectacle. In addition to being a monster movie, *The Host* is a kidnapping movie: Hyun-seo is captured by the monster and the Parks investigate and pursue to attempt a rescue. Typically, in a Hollywood kidnapping narrative, the child is rescued at the end of the film. Even the rescue in *The Host* is ambivalent as Hyun-seo, the child that has been the focus of the Parks’ efforts throughout the film is found dead, but another child, Se-joo, lives. Se-joo is clutched in Hyun-seo’s arms: she shielded him from harm and sacrificed herself. Hyun-seo’s sacrifice further codes her as maternal and paves the way for Se-joo’s adoption. His adoption critically rethinks traditional kinship

structures—demonstrating how the film encourages unity and criticality. *The Host* has a playful attitude towards the voice of Hollywood. Bong utilizes Hollywood conventions but also plays with them in order to convey the ambivalence of inverted exile. His critical relationship with Hollywood mirrors the spirit of criticality that must return in order to prevent being overwhelmed by Western influence.

By recalling the activist spirit of the 1980s, I argue that *The Host* suggests a return of criticality. As discussed earlier, the Wonhyo Bridge was completed in 1981 during the rule of Chun. While Chun was in office, pro-democracy demonstrations reached their apex across South Korea. Now in *The Host*, the Wonhyo Bridge becomes the site of a protest, linking the film to the critical spirit of the 1980s. Activists and police gather at the site where Agent Yellow is to be deployed. The protest's link to the monster also evokes the recent anti-American demonstrations in reaction to the McFarland Incident—which served as the origin of the monster and a reminder of Korea's submissive role in its relationship with the United States. Agent Yellow's obvious reference to the Vietnam War is significant in this context. In the film, Agent Yellow was developed for the War on Terror. South Korea's involvement in the War on Terror has been a contentious issue and the United States' involvement in the Middle East is often compared to Vietnam. The Vietnam War is a particularly violent example of America's involvement throughout Asia in the 20th Century. America's presence in Asia has been a major factor in shaping contemporary South Korea. Also, the Vietnam War was a motivator for activist movements across the globe and is now evoked towards this protest in *The Host*.

The critical voice of the 1980s comes alive through the protest and the setting, but the mise-en-scène associated with the activists brings this voice into dialogue with

anxieties and the commercialism of the contemporary moment. If criticality is returned it must be motivated towards the ambivalences of American influence. This means that Koreans should turn a critical eye towards themselves and their motivations, not just the state. Many of the activists wear surgical masks—reminiscent of the recent fear and panic of the SARS outbreak throughout Asia. They have matching T-shirts they clearly purchased and standing amongst them are several giant, wacky, inflatable, arm-flailing, tube men that are often used for advertising in America. The protestors' T-shirts feature the slogan "Free Park Kang-doo," demonstrating an ignorance of the true dangers: the monster and Korean subservience to the United States. Park's name being spelled in Romanized Korean, and incorrectly at that, further demonstrates this ignorance. A critical spirit that acknowledges individual culpability could amend such ignorance. As the monster approaches off-screen, several protestors begin to scatter, representative of their lack of commitment. Pro-democracy activists of the 1980s routinely encountered violence becoming both symbols of martyrdom and enemies of the state, while these demonstrators flee at the first sign of physical harm. The demonstrator that does not immediately flee tries to get footage of the monster on her digital camera—aligning herself with the rampant consumerism of contemporary South Korean life. Again, the critical attitude of the 1980s is evoked when Agent Yellow is finally deployed. Five activists remain—lined up, facing the camera in cinema of attractions style, wearing surgical masks. The activists die in a cloud of agent yellow, becoming martyrs like many activists in the 1980s. Even critical protest is ambivalent as the commitment of the activists is either lacking (many run away) or leads to death, suggesting that the return of activism is not enough: unity and criticality are necessary.

A return of criticality is demonstrated through Park Nam-il, Hyun-seo's uncle. Nam-il was a student activist in the 1980s. Though college educated, he has rejected the prosperous Korea he helped usher into existence. He is an unemployed alcoholic who has alienated himself from his family and has nothing against which to fight. He just wallows in his misery. The battle with the monster reignites his fighting spirit. Though South Korea is now a democracy, *The Host* encourages a similarly critical attitude. Nam-il demonstrates his activist roots—hurling Molotov cocktails at the monster that clumsily evades them. However, with his last Molotov, Nam-il fails. He drops it—a physical blunder linking him to the monster that frequently slips and lumbers about clumsily. Nam-il's regaining of his critical spirit no longer marks him as passive, but his failed individual action demonstrates that criticality is not enough. Criticality paired with unity can give Koreans the ability to actively co-exist with American influence and avoid being overwhelmed.

Unity is achieved during the climactic battle. The monster performs a final motherly act in bringing the Park family back together. Gang-du, Nam-il, and Nam-joo—now joined by a homeless man—converge on the bridge to battle the monster. Like the Park family, the homeless man has been unable to partake in the economic prosperity of contemporary South Korea. A passive attitude towards American influence has alienated these people through the unjust class system of western capitalism and the intense individualism of contemporary consumer culture. The monster's role as mother allows it to nurture familial and community unity for the first time in *The Host*. But this unity is achieved through attacking a mother, suggesting that this critical unity also requires sacrifice.

The battle against the monster embraces the ambivalence of inverted exile by highlighting individuality and tradition. Each family member attacks individually, utilizing their own skills that are linked to Korean culture in some manner. For example, Nam-il throws his Molotov cocktails that harken back to the activism of the 1980s and Nam-Joo uses her archery skills—archery is a sport in which Korean women excel at an international level. Ultimately, the battle ends in the deaths of the monster and Hyun-seo. The monster was the only mother in the film and Hyun-seo has begun taking on a maternal role. By sacrificing the mothers, the film does not promote a traditional Korean unity that utterly rejects American influence. Ambivalence can actually forge unity, but only through criticality. The sacrifice of the mothers demonstrates that traditional roles will have to be critically transformed to produce unity in inverted exile. Gang-du's adoption of Se-joo demonstrates an active rethinking of traditional kinship relations. Embracing the ambivalences of American influence and inverted exile through an attitude of criticality can create national unity that keeps aspects of tradition alive without rejecting or being overwhelmed by American influence.

Throughout this scene and the whole of *The Host*, a tremendous volume of voices come into conversation with one another forming an aesthetic dialogue that reveals the ambivalence of inverted exile hidden behind what is often perceived as a period of national success. Rather than merely being an attempt at mimicking Hollywood or an anti-American critique, Bong's film brings events of the recent past into dialogue with contemporary issues to highlight both the problems and advantages of South Korea's westernization. *The Host* encourages a critical dialogue that does not fully embrace or denigrate a westernized South Korea. Instead, Bong's monster encourages an active and

critical relationship with inverted exile that embraces ambivalence and paradoxically forges national unity. I go on to contend that *The Host* encourages criticality and unity at the national level as well, in hopes of transforming cities like Seoul from sites of state control to those of nurturing.

Skyscrapers and Deep Wounds: The New Korean City and the Anxieties of Past and Present

In the previous chapter of this project, *The Host*'s monster was addressed as the site of dialogue. Its body was the space in which the voices of multiple times convened. This chapter's site of dialogue is the city, specifically, Seoul. I previously described the Han River as a feminine space, rich with history—the city on the other hand is a masculine space. Seoul is South Korea's political and economic capital, making it the country's hub of the public sphere—a site of masculine control and power. *The Host* reveals the ambivalence of life in an industrial South Korea by placing the metropolitan present into dialogue with a rural past that is ever-present in Bong Joon-ho's films. I argue that by placing a repressed past of American exploitation, oppressive dictatorships, traditional culture, and traditional gender roles amongst the gleaming skyscrapers that claim economic prosperity, but are also products of a contemporary moment characterized by continued American influence and class division, *The Host* reveals to Koreans the ambivalence behind its development into a global economic power. As I have suggested, putting past and present into dialogue through their shared existence in the same space is a principal characteristic of *inverted exilic* filmmaking. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Mikhail Bakhtin posits the *chronotope* as a single unit of space and time in which the two are utterly entangled and cannot be separated. A chronotope does not merely dictate the setting of a text but is utilized to analyze narrative patterns and what they mean to their culture. I suggest that the *aesthetic dialogues* of inverted exilic films

feature chronotopes that combine multiple times into a single space. Past and present are always present and cannot be cleanly divided in films like *The Host*. Chronotopes of inverted exile bring a culture's history into dialogue with the contemporary moment—uncovering the ambivalence of changing nation. The co-existence of past and present in the skyscrapers of Seoul creates critical ambivalence within what were symbols of economic success and industrial development.

Seoul is the economic and political center of South Korea. Gleaming skyscrapers—metal phalluses proclaiming South Korea's mastery over space and its economic success—mark Seoul as a masculine space and cover up the once rural landscape of the region. These monuments to mastery and success repress a past of American exploitation and oppressive dictatorships, which becomes festering wounds below the veneer of progress. The Han River cuts through the city like a scar. It is a reminder of Korea's history that begins to permeate through the city. Under the influence of the United States, South Korea has dramatically transformed into a first-world industrial nation and a global economic power. As a result, Seoul has become an ultra-modern metropolis. Its skyscrapers flaunt Korea's much vaunted economic achievements. In *The Host*, Seoul is a site of attempted masculine control over space, time, and bodies. Class divisions leave some individuals unable to partake in the economic prosperity of contemporary Korea, while many of those who do are crippled by debt and become slaves to their wages and quarantine partitions space and limits the movements and actions of Korean citizens.

I argue that these attempts at mastery are fueled by anxiety. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud describes anxiety as “a particular site of expecting

the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one” (6). South Korea’s turbulent past of oppressive dictatorships, American manipulation, and now waning traditional values becomes dangerous as it threatens to reveal parallels to the anxieties of the present moment, such as unjust class divisions and continued American influence. These contemporary anxieties are believed dangerous by a state that parades its success and represses history. As a result, the state makes obsessive attempts at masculine control. Such totalizing control is impossible and so attempts at mastery by the state inevitably fail. Masculine failures to control space and time allow the past to return and uncover the ambivalence behind the state’s story of progress. By repressing the ambivalence of the present moment, other possible presents are suppressed, not just South Korea’s past. Through *The Host*’s uncovering of ambivalence, both a history and present of American dominance are uncovered. South Korean adherence to American influence marks the nation as the subordinate partner in its relationship with the United States. Once this is realized, South Korea’s repressed femininity is revealed.

In *The Host*, the state’s failed efforts to master are motivated by paranoia. Paranoia characterizes anxiety over the loss of social order and impossible totalities. Anxiety over South Korean history’s return prompts the state’s attempts at masculine and masterful control over fear of losing its economic and political prosperity. Paranoia manifests itself through *The Host*’s epidemic plot and noir stylistics. Central to epidemic plots are paranoia concerning the total loss of social order and the state’s masterful efforts to control the outbreak of a virus through investigation and control over space and bodies through quarantine. Typically, the virus arrives from outside the state’s border and invades the bodies of its citizens. In *The Host*, the virus does not exist, highlighting the

necessity of the failures of the state's attempts at mastery. It is a diegetic fiction created by the American government that holds sway over the Korean government. The state attempts to control the bodies of Korean citizens over fear of a virus that has not infected the citizenry, but the state.

Similarly, paranoia, investigation, and claustrophobic spaces not unlike the compressed space of quarantine are integral to American film noir. I posit that ambivalence to South Korea's rapid transformation into an industrial democracy is central to both *The Host* and inverted exile. In his book, *More Than Night*, James Naremore describes Hollywood thrillers of the 1940s as characterized by "ambivalence about modernity and progress" (45). *The Host* utilizes noir stylistics, including harsh lighting, claustrophobic spaces, and a narrative centered around investigation and paranoia, to address the ambivalences of Korean urban life that the state wishes to repress. Through its utilization of tropes of genres concerned with paranoia and control, *The Host* highlights the state's failures at control of space and time. As a result of these failures, both a turbulent past of oppression and tradition and an ambivalent present return and inhabit the same space. The contact between past and present creates a dialogue that calls attention to South Korea's repressed femininity in its relationship with the United States. South Korea's feminized role has led to its first-world transformation but has also facilitated American dominance influence. My claim is that *The Host* posits that embracing its feminine role, revealed through masculine failure, would produce critical ambivalence and create a more nurturing state rather than one that is obsessed with exercising mastery over time, space, and the bodies of its citizenry.

The corporate skyscraper

Skyscrapers are massive monuments that proclaim man's domination over nature and a nation's economic achievements. They tend to be associated with the economic public sphere, a domain typically gendered as masculine. As such, they are giant phalluses that mark the city as a masculine space. Skyscrapers are also a testament to a nation's industrial development. South Korea was once a rural nation but over the course of the past few decades has become a first-world industrial democracy—making the skyscraper a product of these contemporary economic and political changes. In *The Host*, the state's efforts to totalizing mastery of space and time, which the skyscraper represents, fail. The state's failures open up the claustrophobic spaces of the city that repress both a turbulent past of oppressive dictatorships, activism, and traditional culture and the anxieties of Korea's contemporary moment including, overwhelming American influence, unjust class divisions, and debt. Through these returns, past and present come into dialogue to produce the ambivalence that characterizes life in inverted exile. The co-existence of past and present in this manner characterizes chronotopes of inverted exile in which past and present inhabit the same space.

The Host facilitates the returns of both a repressed past and an ambivalence present. Through this, the past (American exploitation, traditional values, oppressive dictatorships) and the present (continued American influence, economic prosperity, class divides) come to inhabit the same space: Seoul. The necessary co-existence of past and present within a single space in inverted exilic films like *The Host* demonstrates a marked difference from filmmaking in the traditional exilic context. In *An Accented Cinema*, Hamid Naficy utilizes chronotopes to address tendencies in exilic films. He describes two

main tendencies: open and closed forms. Open forms are linked to chronotopes of the homeland that are often idyllic. The homeland is coded as feminine and the open form often utilizes external and agrarian locations, long shots, bright natural lighting, mobile cameras, et cetera (153). Meanwhile, closed forms are linked to chronotopes of exile. Closed forms deal with claustrophobia and paranoia and are characterized by dark lighting, static framing, tight living quarters, et cetera (153). Naficy states that these forms will often come into contact through what he calls “thirdspace,” (212) space where closed and open forms exist simultaneously. However, within inverted exile there is no “thirdspace.” Past and present must inhabit the same space. The changes of inverted exile have occurred without a geographic change in location, so it makes sense that past and present would exist in the same space. In *The Host*, a skyscraper, a symbol of contemporary Korea’s economy, demonstrates the co-existence of past and present in the same space as masculine failures allow for the return of a repressed past.

Just over mid-way through *The Host*, after the death of Park Hee-bong, the surviving members of the Park family separate. Park Nam-il visits a former student activist friend of his in an attempt to locate the cell phone signal of his kidnapped niece, Hyun-seo. They meet at his friend’s place of employment, a corporate office building. The two former activists convene in a narrow alley before an elevator ride up to the offices of the telecom firm. Once in the offices, they work on locating Hyun-seo’s cell phone signal. Nam-il’s friend convenes with police hiding in the next room. It turns out there is a reward on the heads of the members of the Park family as they are believed to be infected by the virus spread by the monster. His former friend has opted to turn in Nam-il for reward money. A chase ensues and Nam-il manages to discover the general

location of Hyun-seo's cell phone and escape from the authorities. The scene's noir stylistics contribute to the plot's emphasis on paranoia and attempts at masculine control through investigation and pursuit. Throughout the scene, moral and economic failures of individuals and the state's failures to capture Nam-il and nurture Koreans allow history to return to inhabit the ultramodern skyscraper. Failures at the state and individual levels reveal the pains of a westernized South Korea and links to an oppressive past that mirrors the present.

The scene begins in a claustrophobic and harshly lit alley, emphasizing the paranoia of the state over the virus and the return of a repressed past as space is constricted at this moment of panic. A point-of-view shot from Nam-il's perspective depicts the skyscraper looming overhead. After a cut, Nam-il is revealed in medium shot; he is covered in shadow and both sides of the alley are in view, emphasizing the claustrophobia of an ultramodern metropolis like Seoul. This claustrophobia differs from the domestic claustrophobia I noted in Chapter One and address more thoroughly in Chapter Three of this project. While claustrophobic domestic spaces are at least partially self-imposed (e.g., you decide what goes in your house), urban claustrophobic spaces emphasize the scope of the state's attempts to master space. Tightly packed buildings clutter the landscape, limiting movement and covering the rural setting of the past.

Nam-il wears a surgical mask, not only serving the epidemic plot of the film, but also recalling paranoia about the SARS epidemic that swept across Asia a few years prior *The Host's* release. SARS became a massive source of paranoia, causing anxiety about people spreading the disease and prompting massive efforts to control its spread by the state. Just as SARS sparked drastic controlling efforts by governments across Asia, the

South Korean government has made similar efforts to contain this dietetically fictional virus. The wail of a siren and close-up of a wanted poster featuring pictures of the Park family are indices of attempts to control and master the Korean citizenry through investigation by a masculine police force. Surveillance and pursuit function to lengthen the state's reach and further limit the space in which people may move freely. Claustrophobia is further emphasized through tight framing as Nam-il's friend pulls him around a corner and they begin to converse in a medium close-up two shot. The men fill the frame and harsh lighting casts them in shadow—emphasizing the cramped quality of the city and the limits imposed by police pursuit. Movement through space is limited by the state's efforts of pursuit and the development of Seoul.

The urban claustrophobia is not limited to external locations as the interior of the skyscraper is compartmentalized to control bodies in space. Tight framing and spaces push out the repressed past of oppression and contemporary anxieties, like unjust class divisions and overwhelming debt. Bong's adherence to Hollywood and noir stylistics begins to fade as the conversation between the two men reveals the economic and social failures of contemporary South Korea. Just as the cracks behind the progress facilitated by American political and economic influence are revealed, the film pulls away from American cultural influence as well. Another point-of-view shot of the skyscraper cuts to a close-up of Nam-il's face in the elevator. The tight framing of the close-up further restricts the space of the already cramped quarters of the elevator. An elevator moves bodies through space, demonstrating a mastery over gravity motivated towards economic goals as it transports corporate workers to their cubicles—yet another claustrophobic space. As the men begin to converse about finding Hyun-seo, the camera cuts back and

forth between close-ups of them in typical Hollywood shot/reverse shot style. However, as the conversation progresses the camera quickly pans between the close-ups in long take, providing a subtle difference from typical Hollywood editing. Multiple pans between the men open up the space of the elevator by showing the spectator the empty space between them. Just as the editing style of scene begins to drift away from a standard commercial style, the content of the conversation departs from mere plot concerns. By opening up the space, the repressed past is able to return, drawing the men together into a relation that facilitates the return of repressed contemporary anxieties. Nam-il brings up their activist days in the '80s and is impressed that his former friend was able to study and get this job. Pro-democracy demonstrations took up a majority of their time as college students in 1980s South Korea. Inevitably, their conversation turns to money, the primary concern for most citizens of an Americanized capitalist democracy. Nam-il's friend calls himself a "salaryman," and goes on to explain that even though he makes a comfortable wage, he struggles to get by because of crippling credit card debt (a common source of anxiety in any westernized capitalist system) equal to his yearly salary. The former friend's crippling debt constricts him just as the claustrophobic city restricts his movements. The debt highlights personal failures (an inability to manage one's finances) and societal failures like the unjust class divisions of western capitalism. Nam-il is unemployed and his friend is a slave to his wage. The state's obsessive efforts at mastery have failed to create a system that nurtures Korean citizens. As a result, a repressed past of both oppression and criticality returns. Placing this turbulent past in dialogue with the contemporary anxieties of class divisions and debt creates critical ambivalence. It does so by highlighting South Korea's departure from the political

oppression of the past and calling attention to a death of criticality that has allowed for economic oppression in the present.

Rather than nurture Koreans, the state has made them into commodities. The reward placed on the heads of the members of the Park family assigns them a monetary value. Those who work in corporate offices are restricted spatially by the walls of their cubicles and economically by crippling debt that makes them totally dependent on their employers. Once at the telecom firm, several medium long shots punctuate a pattern of close-ups. Though these shots allow for a greater stretch of space to be viewed, the cluttered *mise-en-scène* of office cubicles, complete with messy desks, contributes to the claustrophobic aesthetic of the scene and highlights continued mastery over space through excessive organization. An overhead long shot reveals the cramped maze of cubicles and the failed pursuit of Nam-il by bumbling policemen. The space is filled with masculine bodies as corporate public sphere and patriarchal state control collide. Both are forces of ambivalence. The corporate world is linked to South Korea's economic success but also to the class system of western capitalism that restricts the access many have to the pleasures of economic prosperity. Korea's police force is linked to the democratic government and no longer serves as the oppressive foot of military dictators. Yet they still unjustly pursue the Park family, becoming tools of a paranoid South Korean government that wishes to repress the past through total control—reflected in their efforts to eradicate a non-existent virus. These masculine forces convene in a corporate skyscraper—literally a phallus proclaiming South Korea's economic success to the world.

Seoul's giant metal phallus begins to go flaccid as masculine attempts at mastery fail and history returns. What makes a *The Host* a product of inverted exile is the shared presence of both past and present in the same space. The scene is steeped in contemporary concerns—credit card debt, SARS, the claustrophobia of urban life. However, the wounds of South Korea's past fester within the characters Nam-il and his former friend. Both men were student activists in the 1980s (as was Bong). During the 1980s, pro-democracy demonstrations reached a head. Students were framed as enemies by the state which often met them with violence. They were also folk heroes to those sympathetic to their cause, who risked personal harm and sometimes loss of life to help bring democracy to South Korea. Often, the pro-democracy protests of the '80s also held anti-American sentiment as the United States government backed dictators and used its influence to shape legislation to assure American profits in the region. American exploitation and state violence under oppressive dictators are the pains of the past that have not disappeared despite efforts to repress these events. These implicit links to the activism and oppression of the 1980s are connected to the issues I uncovered earlier in the film's form and explicit content. I describe the pains of the past as wounds because their presence is still felt despite efforts to cover them up. *The Host's* plot of oppressive state control spawned by a fictional virus imagined by an influential American government links the contemporary moment to these past events, reopening old wounds as history returns.

Nam-il and his friend have adjusted to life in a westernized South Korea in very different ways—both framed as negative by the film. Bound up in both men are the criticality of the past and the individualism of the present. Through them, the cracks of

contemporary prosperity are revealed and allow for the return of the past that creates critical ambivalence. They have abandoned their active roles as student protestors. Nam-il is an unemployed alcoholic, refusing to partake in the prosperity he helped Korea achieve and losing the fighting spirit of his youth. Through most of the film Nam-il complains about injustice but finds comfort in alcohol rather than actively working against injustice; his criticality only becomes active and productive after he begins working with his family to find Hyun-seo. Before then, his attitude had alienated him from both his family and the workforce. By not seeking employment, Nam-il refuses to partake in the economic prosperity of a westernized South Korea. However, the forces of western capitalism still shape his life. The economically marginal status of Nam-il and the rest of the Park family constricts them, just as the city and police pursuit constrict their movement through space.

His friend has sold out his activist roots for a corporate job. He once protested against oppressive government control and American influence in the region. Now he works in a corporate office modeled around mastery and control. For example, cubicles restrict the space employees inhabit. Quickly racking up massive amounts of credit card debt, working in a corporate office, and turning in a former friend to the police for reward money, he has embraced western capital to a dangerous degree. Everything has become a commodity for personal monetary gain—even human beings. Though Nam-il seems to have rejected Korea's changes, both men have let individualism shape their lives, hindering personal relationships. Nam-il has alienated himself from his family through alcoholism, while the other man is willing to betray old friends for personal gain. Their costuming even reflects the ways they have poorly adjusted to life in inverted exile, but

are still steeped in ambivalence: Nam-il's harbors a necessary critical spirit, and his friend's speaks to the nation's economic success.

Nam-il wears the clichéd costume of a fugitive—a hooded jacket and a baseball cap; however, this is also the outfit of the activist, dressed for confrontation with the police. By linking the fugitive to the activist in this manner, the paranoid efforts of total mastery by contemporary police in *The Host* become associated with the oppressive control of past dictators. Just as activists standing up to an oppressive government eventually led to democratic reforms, revealing the failures of the dictator's attempts at mastery, Nam-il's eluding the police at the end of the scene reveals the failures of the police's paranoid efforts to control bodies and space. Both past and present inhabit the same space through Nam-il's clothes. The activist and the fugitive both reveal the slippages of masculine mastery—the state's obsessive attempts to repress history also fail and the wounds of the past return.

Nam-il's former friend wears the classic uniform of the corporate pencil pusher: suit and tie, highlighting his alignment with western capitalism. Nam-il's role as activist turned fugitive and his friend's as activist turned corporate salaryman both highlight recurring patterns of Korean subordination to outside powers. Bong and his viewers would certainly be conscious of the links between these two former students and their role in the violence of the 1980s and the push towards democracy. Nam-il's friend harbors similarities to Korean nationalists in the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945). In his brief history of contemporary cultural production in South Korea, Michael Robinson describes the how former Korean nationals began to conform to the identity of their Japanese colonizers when political resistance died in the 1930s. They did so for improved

job opportunities and to be part of the middle class (20-21). In losing his fighting spirit, Nam-il's friend has conformed to an identity at least partially shaped by the interests of a neocolonial power against which he once fought. He once demonstrated against American exploitation in South Korea but now conforms to a role within the western capitalist system. The Japanese colonial period takes on significance here as it another instance of Korea taking a subordinate role to an outside power as it does in its neocolonial relationship with the United States. It is a source of wounds that continue to reopen as the pattern of Korean subordination returns, undermining the state's story of progress and attempts at mastery.

Wounds of a repressed past reopen as contemporary attempts at masculine mastery fail within this skyscraper. Nam-il evades the police who attempt total control over Korean bodies. Meanwhile, the tight spaces of the corporate office (e.g., elevators and cubicles) crack open as the unjust power relations behind Korea's economic prosperity are revealed (e.g., credit card debt and the commodification of Korean citizens). These failures allow the past to return by highlighting patterns of oppressive control and subordination to outside powers. A paranoia-inducing past emerges from within the skyscraper that attempts to repress both the past and possible presents. When past and present inhabit the same space, the ambivalence of inverted exile is produced.

Hospitals and fictional viruses

The hospital is another urban location in *The Host* that demonstrates the failures of masculine attempts at mastery. Hospitals are sites where science, business, and the state converge in order to exert control over life and death. They are places where local and global forces meet: doctors utilize equipment and techniques, developed mostly in

the West, locally to provide medical care for the community. Needless to say, the changes brought on by South Korea's political and economic shifts have shaped Korean hospitals, allowing for greater access to sophisticated equipment and more varied medical education opportunities. And yet, in *The Host*, the hospital is a site of failed control and paranoia rather than a caring environment made all the more effective through "progress." Rather than caring for people in the film, hospitals are tools for controlling Korean bodies in a failed attempt to master a virus that does not exist. *The Host's* epidemic plot highlights the state's failures. As revealed in the film, the virus does not exist; it is a fiction proposed by the American government and acted upon by the South Korean government. Korea's adherence to the will of the United States in the film causes action without evidence. The state's failures to control the virus and its status as an American fiction reveal South Korea's repressed feminization in its relationship to the United States. Korea makes efforts to repress this through attempts at mastery that prevent the state from nurturing and supporting Koreans. I argue that *The Host* suggests that South Korea should acknowledge and embrace the ambivalence produced by its femininity. While its feminized role has allowed for American guidance and exploitation, it has also facilitated the vast economic and political reforms that have transformed the nation. By embracing femininity rather than failed attempts at masculine control, the Korean state can accept critical ambivalence and learn to nurture and support its citizens, allowing the state to combat contemporary anxieties like debt and class division.

Hospitals are of primary importance in epidemic plots. *The Host* subverts the conventions of the epidemic subgenre by making its virus a diegetic fiction that invades the state rather than the bodies of citizens. Epidemic films are all about the state's ability

to exert mastery to regain control after a viral or bacterial outbreak. Control and stability are endangered as the infection surfaces and the state, through scientific creativity and military might, is able to gain mastery over the situation and reestablish the status quo. Epidemic narratives often take place in urban centers and revolve around threats from primitive nature (like an infected monkey) or the military (biological weapons/terrorism). In this regard, an epidemic film would seem perfect to address the anxieties of a nation that has a perpetual enemy in North Korea and tries to instill intense nationalistic pride into its citizens. After the SARS outbreak, epidemic narratives prey on anxieties over lived events and media fueled paranoia over illnesses like bird flu. SARS spawned paranoia over interactions with others, splintering communities across Asia, and inspired massive efforts to control the outbreak by the state. However, the virus in *The Host* comes from an ally—it is American influence. The state's efforts to control the “outbreak” all fail because the virus has entered the body of the state, not its citizens. Rather than successful efforts to control the spread of the virus to reestablish the status quo, I argue that *The Host* highlights failures in order to rethink the status quo. The virus's diegetically fictional status highlights a pattern of American fictions infecting South Korea that demonstrate Korea's subordination to the United States.

The virus is American influence within the body of South Korea, in many ways it is inverted exile. This virus is an American fiction that has infested South Korea. The virus's fictional status demonstrates the overwhelming influence America has on the South Korean government. Korea acts on the virus with zero evidence supporting its existence—America's word is enough. The state harms Koreans, namely the Parks, when it acts on this fiction produced by American influence. By causing harm, the state's

actions illustrate the ambivalence of the same influence that has brought political reform and economic prosperity. My characterization of American influence as infecting South Korea is in tension with the pregnancies caused by American influence I describe in Chapter One. *The Host*'s monster is born from the Han River (Korea's womb) from the dumping of American chemicals (America's seed) and later becomes a mother by "birthing" its victims through its vaginal mouth. Both the infestation and pregnancies highlight South Korea's feminine role in its relationship with the United States. However, pregnancy is ambivalent, while infestation is not. Pregnancy causes the mother great pain but produces potential for nurturing and love—similarly, the monster is ambivalent as both a killer of and mother to Koreans. Infestation only causes harm. I argue that *The Host* uses this infestation to recover both a repressed past and femininity not to simply demonize American influence by characterizing it as a damaging and insidious infestation. Instead, the film asks Koreans to embrace the ambiguity of and produced by femininity to allow the consequences of pregnancy, like the potential for nurturing, emerge from South Korea's relationship to the United States.

Infestation and pregnancy are linked as the virus is believed to be a byproduct of the monster. As described in Chapter One, the monster's origin references a real life event: the McFarland incident, in which an American mortician, working in an American military base in Seoul, ordered gallons of formaldehyde poured down a drain that empties into the Han River. I described the formaldehyde as America's seed and the Han River as South Korea's womb. Shortly after the monster's initial attack the idea that the monster is the source of a virus takes hold, and the state begins quarantine measures in an attempt to control bodies and spaces around the Han River. Park Gang-du admits the monster's

blood splashed on his face and he has since had contact with his family and so the Park family is taken to the hospital for a battery of tests. They become a locus for paranoia. The state's attempts at mastery fail as the Park family escapes in order to search for Hyun-seo. Paranoia causes the state to put a price on their heads despite zero evidence of a virus. Later in the film, after the death of Hee-bong, Gang-du is captured again and taken to another hospital. Here the state's paranoia and desperation culminates as a doctor is willing to harm Gang-du in search of the virus. Again, the state's mastery fails and he is able to escape to join his family for the final confrontation with the monster.

The style of *The Host* during the scene in which the Parks are together in the hospital after the monster's initial attack exemplifies the state's masculine attempts at mastery through the same emphasis on claustrophobia that characterized the corporate office. Close-ups make up a bulk of the shots set in hospitals, and virtually every shot inside them is in shallow focus. Space in the shots is compressed, emphasizing how the state's quarantine imposes limits and controls movement. Bong's mise-en-scène works towards the same goals as the hospital is packed tight with people and machines. A plastic curtain cuts Gang-du off from his family and the rest of the world. In addition, the plastic curtain limits his space and blurs his face—he has been reduced to a virus that must be controlled rather than a human being. The state's efforts of control through investigation transform the hospital into a space of control rather than a caring or nurturing environment. These efforts are consequences of the repression of Korea's femininity. Hospitals in *The Host* are no longer sites of nurturing, but sites of paranoia and potential harm. When Gang-du is in the military hospital, in a desperate attempt to locate the fictional virus, they prepare to drill into Gang-du's head to locate it in his brain.

Korea's obsession with trying to repress its femininity through mastery over space, time, and bodies proves harmful to Korean citizens. If Korea could embrace its feminine role and take up a critical attitude in its relationship with the United States, it could create a nurturing environment that cares for Korean citizens.

Instead South Korea attempts masculine mastery and fails repeatedly. The Park family escapes the hospital, Nam-il eludes the police, Gang-du escapes the military hospital, and the Parks are able to cross the quarantine border surrounding the Han River multiple times. These numerous failures undermine Korea's claims of masculine mastery allowing for the returns of a past of American exploitation and South Korea's repressed femininity. Through these returns, contemporary South Korean life becomes ambivalent as it becomes clear that American influence has not just facilitated economic prosperity. The virus is a fiction imagined by the American government that the South Korean government acts upon without evidence. It is an idea that has infested South Korea—emphasizing its subordination to the United States. The McFarland incident impregnated Korea—giving birth to the monster and calling attention to South Korea's subordinate and feminized role. McFarland's light punishment and American military presence on Korean soil illustrate these points. The monster's role as mother is a reminder of the ambivalence of American influence that has affected positive political and economic change in Korea. Through continued masculine failures, I contend that *The Host* encourages the return of Korea's femininity characterized by its subordinate role in its relationship with the United States. By embracing South Korea's feminine role, the nurturing potential of pregnancy can overcome the harm of infection.

Just as South Korea's failures at mastering space recall its feminized role in its relationship with the United States, they also allow a repressed past of American influence to return. The virus's dietetically fictional status as a creation of the United States reveals a pattern of American fictions taking hold in Korea. This pattern reveals American guidance and exploitation in Korea.

After World War II, Korea was divided by western powers into the communist North (under Soviet influence) and the capitalist South (under American influence). The United States used its political influence to ingrain its capitalist ideology into the South, creating differences between the North and South and usurping the country's claims of unity. Differences in ideology between the North and South became "essential" differences between the countries that lead to war. South Korea's acceptance of capitalist ideology has also been integral in its transformation into a global economic power. However, these ideological differences are products of the West and their "essentiality" is a fiction.

This practice continued decades later as the United States and Hollywood would exert pressure on the South Korean government to modify import laws and quota systems to allow a greater Hollywood presence in Korea in the 1980s (Paquet, 35-36). By exercising its political muscle, the United States made it possible for Hollywood studios to open branches on Korean soil, export more movies to the country, and spend much more time in Korean theaters. These changes led to Hollywood's domination of the Korean market until the late 1990s. Hollywood films are more examples of American fictions taking root in South Korea. Though Hollywood's dominance once crippled Korea's film industry, its tremendous influence has shaped the New Korean films that

now garner international attention. I argue that this pattern of influential American fictions demonstrates the ambivalence of South Korea's feminized role in its relationship with the United States. American cultural and political influence has facilitated exploitation of Korea by the United States, South Korea's move towards democracy, the former struggle of domestic Korean cinema, and the recent boom of New Korean Cinema. By acknowledging this femininity and its ambivalence rather than attempting to repress them, the South Korean state can turn a critical eye towards western influence and foster a more nurturing nation.

American influence is central South Korea's transformation into an industrialized nation and the changing values that characterize inverted exile. Paradoxically, American influence is figured as both a virus and a pregnancy in *The Host*. Both these figurations highlight the dominance of the United States and South Korea's feminized role in its relationship with America. In an effort to repress history, present anxieties, and Korea's femininity, the state makes repeated attempts towards mastery over space and time. These efforts of mastery manifest themselves in *The Host* through urban development, investigation, and quarantine. Such efforts to totality are impossible and necessarily fail. Through these failures a repressed past of tradition, oppression, and criticality to return alongside present anxieties of class division and debt. Characteristic of chronotopes of inverted exile, past and present inhabit the same space in the aesthetic dialogue of *The Host*, creating ambivalence and highlighting Korea's repressed femininity. In the film, the virus serves as a basis towards efforts to master time and space that ultimately fail and harm Korean citizens. By embracing femininity rather than repressing it, the consequences of pregnancy could overcome those of viral infection, creating possibilities

for a more nurturing state. For example, rather than combating a fictional virus, the state's attention could have been devoted to the monster and Hyun-seo would have been saved. Instead, the Park family became a pawn in the state's failed efforts towards mastery. The Parks learn collective unity to become heroes of the film, but without the aid of the state. Through its failures of masculine mastery, South Korea's gleaming phalluses (Seoul/skyscrapers) become flaccid as its feminized role is emphasized and the myth of pure progress is disassembled through dialogue. As a result, Bong asks the viewer to glance away, instead pulling the emphasis of *The Host* to more feminized spaces—the Han River and the home.

The Feminine Patriarch: Domestic Life in Inverted Exile

The home has become a central site of ambivalence in a contemporary South Korea that revels in the comforts of its economic success while simultaneously fearing the loss of traditional values. South Korea's monumental changes over the past sixty years have drastically altered Korean domestic life. Agrarian lifestyles in rustic Korean-style homes have given way to western-style apartments in large urban centers. The prominence of home-cooked meals has been encroached upon by processed snacks and instant noodles. Korean families, who once used to live three generations to a home, now find themselves broken and estranged by growing divorce rates and an individualism incited by rabid consumerism and neoliberal economic reforms.

As a country changes around its populace, the loss of traditional domestic life becomes a consequence of *inverted exile*. Through its *aesthetic dialogue*, *The Host* brings Korea's past into contact with its westernized present. The film's melodramatic focus on domestic *mise-en-scène* suggests the need for a critical and active relationship with Western influence. In this manner, the exploration of domestic space in *The Host* contrasts greatly with Bong's other films. In *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000) and *Mother* (*Madeo*, 2008), homes that have not adjusted to inverted exile either totally embrace the West or reject it and become places of monstrosity as a result. *The Host* is a monster movie with melodramatic elements that answers Bong's other films through the transvaluation of familial roles and domestic spaces.

My previous chapter dealt with the contemporary South Korean city as a masculine space that is marred by failed attempts at mastery by the state, science, and corporations over history, space, and bodies. I suggested that *The Host* embraces these failures in order to acknowledge the ambivalence of inverted exile. By contrast, the home is typically regarded as a feminine space, which *The Host* wants to rethink. Fluctuating familial values in Korea are reflected in the lack of mothers in *The Host*'s Park family. The traditional idea of the Confucian family calls for a strong patriarch, which the Park family also lacks as Gang-du is a bumbling slacker and his father (Byun Hee-Bong) does not command respect in his home. Over the course of the film, Gang-du learns to become both matriarch and patriarch of his home; this melding of gender roles is a result of the active and critical relationship with life in inverted exile and manifests itself through changes in the space and food of his home.

The Park home/shop

Gang-du's home in *The Host* is first introduced as a snack shop in a park on the Han River. The scene functions to establish the film's protagonists. Gang-du is a slacker, his father, Hee-bong, is not respected as a patriarch, and his daughter, Hyun-seo, shows little respect for her father—her primary concern is her father's lack of money to procure a new cell phone for her. A medium long shot of Gang-du and Hee-bong "working" provides the first glimpse of their home. Hee-bong stands in front of the shop while Gang-du sleeps behind the counter. Gang-du rests behind an overwhelming wall of prepackaged food products that dominates the frame: cans of beer, bottled drinks, chips, candy, et cetera. Shortly after, the interior of the Park home is revealed in a two-shot of Gang-du and his daughter, Hyun-seo. Though out of focus, stacks of dehydrated noodle

bowls cover the cluttered counter space behind Gang-du and Hyun-seo. Very little empty wall space is visible and what wall space is visible is grimy and tan. Gang-du and Hyun-seo sit in front of the television to watch their sister and aunt in an archery competition.

From the outside where the scene begins, the Park home has only one feature that makes it appear to be a place of residence: a sleeping Gang-du. The prepackaged food products that fill the frame are covered in logos and graphics that mark them as commercial commodities. Through the windows still more goods can be seen behind Gang-du. Gang-du's house is more business than home. Capitalism has overrun the Park home; it is more shop than nurturing or comforting living space. The cramped quality of the tiny home is accentuated by the tight framing of shots inside that leave little space in the frame for anything other than the two figures. Shallow focus eliminates any illusion of depth further coding the space as tight and claustrophobic. The lack of space in the Park home demonstrates ambivalence towards a western capitalist Korea. It calls attention to the economically marginal status of the Park family—they have not been able to take part in South Korea's economic prosperity, but simultaneously, they seem to embrace capitalism by transforming their home into a place of business.

The cramped quarters of the Park home also affect the bodies of those that inhabit the space. There is no room for a mother or the extended family one would find in a traditional Korean household—even if their family was not broken by matriarchal abandonment. Hyun-seo's uncle is only mentioned through dialogue at this point in the film, and her aunt is seen on television. Their absences are felt. The two-shot inside the home puts father and daughter on equal terms; Hyun-seo's demanding tone with her father and Gang-du's mocking of Hee-bong demonstrates little respect for elders and a

lack of patriarchal power within the Park family. However, Nam-joo's (Hyun-seo's aunt) ability to escape the confines of the home to succeed in the public sphere reveals the desires of changing familial roles.

Traditional values do have a voice in the dialogue of the Park home. Like one would find in a traditional Korean home, three generations of Parks live under one roof. Also, their support of Nam-joo's participation in the archery competition (a sport in which South Korean women excel at the international level) demonstrates a predilection towards familial unity despite their alienation from one another.

The food of this home is seen everywhere. It fills nearly every space and dominates the outside of the home. Bottled beverages, instant noodles, and various snacks are both commodities and sustenance. They comprise the products the Parks sell and their diet. Gang-du and his daughter drink beer in front of the television and, later in the film, the family eats instant noodles. Home-cooked meals and traditional Korean foodstuffs are not seen until the film's epilogue. Not only are these food products commodities of an industrial Korea, but they are also not particularly nutritious. This home is not the most nurturing of spaces.

At this point in the film, the Parks have passively let their home be shaped by inverted exile. Western capitalism has transformed their home into a business. It has become a space of commerce, not one of nurturing. Traditional family values have crumbled, leaving the Parks without mothers, and the fathers of the family have not learned to adjust to their roles as single parents. Both the heightened standard of living associated with a westernized Korean and the familial unity linked with traditional values has escaped the Parks.

Excesses of *The Host*'s domestic spaces

Melodrama is the filmic genre most often associated with domestic space and the family. Bong Joon-ho's attention to domestic mise-en-scène and family life demonstrates a melodramatic tendency in his films. This tendency participates in a practice of melodrama in Korean cinema. For decades under oppressive governments following World War II, South Korean filmmakers had to offer Korean audiences light escapist fare that could not be interpreted as critiquing the government in any capacity (Robinson, 22-23). The influence of Hollywood "women's films" and a tradition of melodrama in popular Korean literature made melodrama one of the go-to genres of commercial Korean cinema. Bong's films utilize elements of melodrama in order to address the changing domestic lives of Koreans in inverted exile, uncovering the ambivalence of contemporary Korean life.

In her articles "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" and "Melodrama Revised," Linda Williams describes the excesses of melodrama the constitutive characteristics of the genre. Prior to Williams's work, excess was used as a pejorative to cast melodrama in a negative light. Excesses of emotion were described as repulsive. Instead, Williams wishes to foreground these excesses as *primary* and *ambivalent* characteristics. They are its principal sources of attraction as well as repulsion. In doing so, she compares melodrama to other "body" genres (e.g., horror and porn)—genres in which bodily excesses are the chief defining characteristics. In these genres, fright and arousal affect the spectator's body just as emotional excess makes the spectator cry in melodrama. Williams's argument acknowledges melodrama and its excesses as the

central mode of Hollywood filmmaking rather than excess to be excluded. Similarly, melodrama is of principal importance to Korean cinema.

Bong's emphasis on domestic mise-en-scène is a melodramatic element in his film that calls attention to the ambivalences of contemporary Korean home life. According to Ben Singer in "Melodrama and Modernity," "nonnatural mise-en-scène" crammed with props of obvious and over-determined meaning is one of the defining excesses of melodrama (39). Aspects of the Park family's home become over-determined figures of life in inverted exile. The home's initial dominance by pre-packaged food items marks it as a space of commerce rather than a nurturing environment. Food has become a commodity of individual convenience rather than an expression of Korean culture. Rather than mere innocuous objects set before the camera, they become wrought with an "excess" of meaning when viewed through the context of inverted exile. This excess is integral to the film's figuration of domestic life in inverted exile. These excesses allow the voices housed within the mise-en-scène to join the aesthetic dialogue of *The Host*.

The Host's excessively over-determined mise-en-scène reflects the ambivalence of inverted exile and the play of attraction and repulsion that characterizes life in this context. American influence on South Korea is both attractive and repulsive as a source of desire and anxiety. The individual comforts of a first-world South Korea are attractive, while the loss of traditional family values and other anxieties induced by inverted exile mark western influence as repulsive. Through its melodramatic focus on the constitutive excess of domestic mise-en-scène, *The Host* creates a similarly ambivalent play between attraction and repulsion that Williams describes in women's films. This ambivalence

allows the anxieties and desires associated with both western influence and traditional culture to surface, and through their interaction, a trans-valuation of familial roles and domestic spaces in inverted exile becomes possible.

Inverted exile and abjection

Inverted exile arises at a time of great change, during which traditional values are excluded in the excitement for the pleasures affiliated with national “development”—democracy, individual comforts, economic opportunities, et cetera. Eventually anxiety over what was lost in this excitement begins to emerge and the ambivalence of inverted exile holds sway. *The Host* encourages ambivalence, suggesting a rebirth that embraces the ambivalence of western influence and traditional Korean values, rather than embracing one side of the binary. The film’s melodramatic focus on domestic mise-en-scène demonstrates how this rebirth can transform homes and familial roles. Over-determined domestic mise-en-scène is one of the excesses that define melodrama. Similarly, excess is vital to Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection.

In “Approaching Abjection,” Julia Kristeva encourages an ambivalent attitude towards the abject—a confrontation with the disgust felt towards it and the curiosity the abject instills in us. The abject is something that has been cast off/excluded, but it is also a portion of one’s self. For example, waste is abject; it is expelled from a body and regarded as repulsive. However, it is also a product of that same body; it was a part of it. The abject object is viewed as other and as an excess to be cast out, but it is part of oneself. It is produced by me and helps define “I” (3). Abjection is necessary as the refusal to abject would mean death (e.g., one must excrete waste to survive); therefore, the excesses of the abject are primary—much like the excesses associated with

melodrama. Food and maternal bodies are sites of abjection that are also excesses central to melodrama. Meanwhile, totally embracing the abject is not socially viable. We must learn to repress some of the attraction towards the abject to conform to social roles. Kristeva suggests “rebirth with and against abjection” (31). Rather than being crippled by anxiety through rejection of the abject or being socially excluded because of a wholesale embrace of the abject, an ambivalent attitude allows for this “cathartic rebirth” that facilitates creativity and freedom (within not from).

The Host suggests a similar attitude to inverted exile. Koreans should embrace the ambivalence of their context. Simply casting out the West as other in favor of an idyllic, “essential” Korean identity is an unobtainable and undesirable wish as it would deny the desires of a western Korea. Totally embracing western influence by Koreans would result in the loss of self—of Korean cultural identity and deny desires of traditional culture. The transformation of Gang-du’s home from a cramped shack dominated by consumer goods to a warm, nurturing home that still functions as a business, suggests a cathartic rebirth to negotiate life in inverted exile. *The Host* implicitly suggests that alterations ought to be made in the home in addition to changes in political practices.

Maternal bodies are significant to melodrama, but the only mother present in *The Host* is an abject one, the monster. The absence of mothers in the film is the product of shifting cultural values resulting in increased divorce rates and weakening of familial bonds. In adjusting to the shifting values of life in inverted exile, Gang-du needs to learn to become a nurturing single parent by functioning as both father and mother. A plastic relationship towards traditional gender and familial roles in the face of great change allows Gang-du to negotiate the ambivalence of inverted exile. According to Kristeva, the

maternal body is one of our earliest abjections. It is where we come from; it serves as a source of great pleasure to infants and then becomes a source of anxiety as we get older. Just like melodrama and inverted exile, abjection participates in a play between attraction and repulsion. Maternal melodramas place great emphasis on the maternal body often calling on mothers to sacrifice themselves in some manner in these films. A mother in a maternal melodrama may sacrifice herself for her children, her children for their own welfare, her career for love, et cetera (Doane, 35). Sacrifice is an ambivalent act as it calls for pain and loss but usually is motivated towards a communal goal.

There is one other maternal body in *The Host*: the homeland, South Korea. In inverted exile, the homeland becomes an ambivalent site. It changes, bringing with its changes new pleasures and anxieties. Melodrama, particularly the maternal melodrama calls for sacrifice, while to abject is to exclude. *The Host* posits a “cathartic rebirth” that attempts to strike a balance between sacrifice and exclusion to create an identity that embraces the ambivalence of inverted exile. One should sacrifice some of the desires of western influence and traditional culture, while also excluding aspects of both tradition and western influence that induce anxiety. The ambivalence of inverted exile reveals itself through simultaneous sacrifice and exclusion. Both incarnations of the Park home in *The Host* as well as the homes depicted in *Barking Dogs Never Bite* and *Mother* demonstrate different positions towards this ambivalent dichotomy of sacrifice and exclusion, attraction and repulsion, western influence and traditional values.

Barking Dogs and embracing the West

By putting figurations of inverted exilic homes from Bong’s other films into dialogue with *The Host*, I hope to illuminate the significance of the changes in the Park

home by the end of the film. At the film's onset, Gang-du takes a passive role in the shaping of his home and familial role: it is molded by western capitalism and shifts in familial values. Bong's other films point to active roles in domestic identity formation that prove to be monstrous/dangerous. His first feature, *Barking Dogs Never Bite* exhibits the dangers of completely embracing Western influence. Traditional culture has been completely excluded—totally abjected. *Barking Dogs* is set in a western-style apartment complex. The film's protagonist is an unemployed humanities graduate student, Yoon-ju (Lee Sung-jae), whose wife is pregnant. Yoon-ju and his wife live alone—there is no mention of family, let alone any physical presence of them. His role as patriarch in his home has been usurped by his wife; she is the sole source of income for the household and she bosses Yoon-ju around. Rather than utilizing the influence of the West to rethink and limit the anxieties of traditional familial roles, Yoon-ju and his wife merely invert them. Cultural change can allow for the transformation of domestic relationships into partnerships rather than a hierarchical structure that places man above woman (or in this case, woman above man). The overwhelming influence of western individualism has made Yoon-ju incredibly selfish: he kills dogs simply because they annoy him; the death of a peer means there is a job opening for him; and he is willing to take his wife's severance pay to bribe the dean for a professor job. By paying this bribe, he has participated in the corruption of a once highly respected career in Korea. The influence of the West has changed the world around Yoon-ju. As one's career shapes aspects of one's personality, Yoon-ju has, in a way, bought himself. Yoon-ju has made himself a commodity that can be bought or sold—just like anything else in a capitalist system.

Long shots of the façade of the apartment complex with a single individual dwarfed by the enormity of the building demonstrate how overwhelming the influence of western culture is in this film. Yoon-ju's apartment is shot with corners, hallways, and other rooms just barely in view on the edges of the frame. Naturalistic lighting illuminates the immediate area while these corners and glimpses of spaces are dark. The periphery of this space takes on a mysterious and sinister quality. Formally, the voice of the West emanates from the stylistic influence of Alfred Hitchcock. Harsh shadows, dark corners and hallways, and play with the edges of the frame all demonstrate that Bong is not outside western influence. Lurking around the corners of Yoon-ju's apartment is a repressed past that encroaches on the present from the periphery.

Anxieties and desires linked to the past that have been repressed inevitably return as it is impossible to make a clean cut from a culture or the past, just as it is impossible to return to a "pure" or "untainted" Korean culture. His apartment is very western in every way except for the bed. The voice of a non-western Korea asserts itself through the bed mat that lays flat on the floor. Yoon-ju and his pregnant wife sleep together on this mat (rather than a western-style mattress), making it one of the few places where this developing family demonstrates any sort of unity. Presumably, it is also the site of the primal scene of the baby's conception, linking it to the abject. Anything associated with Old Korea has been excluded and pushed to the periphery in this film. The bed mat is one example how Old Korea returns from the periphery by taking a space of centrality in the bedroom, though it is still flat against the borders (perimeter) of the room.

The repressed past also returns through a plot concerning the eating of dog meat. Dog meat has been illegal in South Korea for just over a decade. While the Korean

government claims this is for health reasons, activists who want to restore the legal status of dog meat as a traditional Korean foodstuff claim that it was made illegal because of pressure from the West. Dog meat is a site of ambivalence; it is something from Korea's past that causes anxiety for some, but is a source of desire for others. The building's elderly janitor (Byun Hee-bong) eats dog in a traditional stew made in the basement of the complex. Now that dogs have become pets and status items in New Korea, the janitor becomes an ambivalent figure. The killing and eating of dogs is coded as sinister and monstrous in the film, but it is clear that the janitor has been left behind by change. His monstrous acts are merely an expression of his culture. A homeless man squats in the basement of the building and eats dog in the film in order to survive. At *Barking Dogs*'s climax, he attempts to cook a dog on the roof. He has been left behind by South Korea's economic success and his eating of dog also marks him as an ambivalent character. Yoon-ju's killing of dogs is solely for his convenience. He has excluded traditional culture and repressed Korean history to embrace the West. However, this past returns to centrality through his killing of dogs. Though the past has returned, Yoon-ju's exclusion of Korean tradition removes ambivalence from his treatment of dogs. His killing of dogs is not an expression of his culture or a result of need; it is purely out of the individualism associated with totally embracing Western influence.

Yoon-ju refuses to sacrifice any of the desires or exclude any of the anxieties of western influence and in doing so completely casts out traditional Korean culture. He plays a role in a system that uncritically accepts western influence. Professorships have been transformed into corrupt commodities, creating anxiety in those who desire to make that their career. Yoon-ju and his wife have merely inverted the hierarchy of traditional

domestic roles, rather than using the influence of the West to critically transform gender roles in the home to alleviate anxieties by creating a supportive partnership rather than a relationship of dominance and subordination. Yoon-ju's exclusion of traditional culture in favor of western influence contrasts with Gang-du's "cathartic rebirth" at the end of *The Host*.

The Host's epilogue brings us back into the Park home after the death of the monster. Gang-du and his home have changed much since the start of the film. They have actively and critically adjusted to inverted exile. Now Gang-du has embraced the ambivalence of contemporary South Korean life, working "with and against" the forces of American influence, becoming a *feminine patriarch* by trans-valuing domestic roles to better suit life in inverted exile. Gang-du's transformation is a product of his "cathartic rebirth" that strikes a balance between sacrificing some of the desires of both western influence and Korean tradition to exclude anxieties induced by both. He has gotten rid of his bleached hair and grown out his natural black hair, pushing against the blonde of western influence. His family is still shaped by the New Korean context. Inhabiting the home is only himself and his newly adopted son, Se-joo. Adoption is a contentious issue in South Korea, as Korean children are often adopted by Americans. Many feel that Korean children should be adopted by Koreans, though revenue is brought in by foreign adopters. Through the adoptive act, Gang-du is actively pushing against the West—giving this boy a Korean home rather than letting him be adopted by westerners. However, he is also trans-valuing traditional values in order to preserve aspects of Korean culture in the face of western influence. Adoption undercuts traditional kinship associations, rethinking how families can be formed. After the death of his daughter,

Gang-du's adoption of Se-joo demonstrates his actively embracing his role as a single father. Hyun-seo's death would have released him from this role, but Gang-du chooses to sacrifice individual comfort for the benefit of a child—not unlike the sacrifices of a mother in a maternal melodrama.

Mother and rejecting the West

Bong's 2009 film, *Mother*, demonstrates the dangers of utterly rejecting western influence—illuminating the other extreme not seen in *The Host*. The titular character (played by Kim Hye-ja) refuses to adapt to western influence in any way. She sacrifices the pleasures of a westernized South Korea, though her life is shaped by the anxieties of a changing Korea: she is a single mother. Simultaneously, she refuses to sacrifice any desires or exclude any anxieties of traditional culture. Over the course of the film she attempts to prove the innocence of her mentally handicapped son, Do-joon (Won Bin), who killed a teenage girl. Eventually, the mother's refusal to abject—to give in to western influence at all—becomes monstrous. It becomes known that she tried to kill herself and her son when he was very young and she kills a homeless man who witnessed her son killing the girl. In the end, a mentally ill boy goes to prison for the murder of which Do-joon was accused and the mother is never caught for her murder of the homeless man.

Though the mother refuses to partake in the pleasures of a first-world Korea, her life is shaped by the forces of change. She is a single mother living alone with her son. The changing values of New Korea have broken this family; there is no mention of Do-joon's father or any other family. Her struggles as a single parent do not arise from a lack of masculine figures, but from her unwavering refusal to critically rethink domestic roles

in inverted exile. Rather than allowing the influence of the West to free her from the anxieties of traditional gender roles (i.e. devoting herself to her son and limited access to the public sphere) by transforming her role to tackle the problems of single parenthood, she clings to her traditional role as matriarch by doting on her son and cooking traditional meals. By the end of *The Host*, Gang-du has incorporated maternal aspects (e.g., cooking traditional meals) into his identity as a single father, but the mother never critically trans-values traditional domestic gender roles.

The mother's heavy association with traditional values is demonstrated by her usually being located on the right (East) side of the frame and by a long shot at the start of the film of her in a large open field—a connection to the rural past. When her home is shown, it is usually in the kitchen. The grey and dingy walls bring attention to her economically marginal status. Like many of *The Host*'s protagonists, she has not been able to and/or does not choose to partake in the economic success of a western Korea. She dotes on her son, constantly cooking and feeding him traditional foods, claiming they will help with his virility—demonstrating a desire for more family. Her cooking implements and furniture have the patina of age; they are not sleek and shiny like contemporary consumer goods—another reference to her economically marginal status. New Korea sneaks into her home as she has a western-style toilet in her bathroom. Just as contemporary Korea has shaped her family; it also manages to sneak into her home. Ironically, it is through the toilet, a device to facilitate abjection, which she refuses to do. The bed mat in *Barking Dogs Never Bite* is also a site of the abject where traditional culture re-emerges into a home that has excluded the past—just as the toilet in *Mother* demonstrates how western influence is unavoidable.

While *The Host* lacks an ordinary maternal body (the only one being the monster), *Mother* places much emphasis on the titular character's association with all things bodily. *Mother* begins and ends with long takes of her dancing, calling attention to her body. She sells Chinese herbs and illegally performs acupuncture—a healing art that has a long history throughout Asia and has since come under legislative control (that the mother refuses to acknowledge). Like the characters that eat dog in *Barking Dogs Never Bite*, the mother participates in a now illegal activity that is bodily. Many of her interactions with her son are focused on the body as she feeds him and gives him medicine. The mother's alignment with all things bodily, functions to demonstrate her becoming monstrous. Initially her association with the body seems nurturing; her cooking, administering of medicine, and performing acupuncture are all meant to nurture bodies. However, she becomes monstrous as she commits murder and then uses the acupuncture to forget her crimes (she alone knows an acupuncture technique that makes one forget painful memories). Acupuncture is transformed from therapy to a tool of repression. Even after her son goes free, she does not take the opportunity to adjust to contemporary Korean life. When she uses the acupuncture to forget her crimes, she continues to reject western influence. She strives for freedom from a western Korea, not within it. As freedom from western influence is not possible and what is repressed eventually returns, it seems likely there will be more violence in her future.

Mother's titular character attempts at nurturing become monstrous because she does not take a critical and active attitude towards the ambivalences of inverted exile. Her refusal to accept any western influence despite the role it plays in shaping her life prevents her from striking a balance between sacrifice and exclusion. She has totally

sacrificed the pleasures of contemporary Korea and cannot exclude contemporary and traditional anxieties (i.e. single motherhood and limited access to the public sphere). Meanwhile, in *The Host*, Gang-du slays the monster, overcoming monstrosity and learning to nurture. While the changing values of a westernized South Korea have created single parents, they also provide opportunities for rethinking and transforming domestic gender roles. Gang-du's success as a single parent by the end of *The Host* and the mother's failures are not products of their respective genders but of their relationship to gender in inverted exile. Gang-du is able to strike a balance between sacrifice and exclusion in his cathartic rebirth that trans-values his role as a father.

***The Host* and cathartic rebirth**

The first shot inside Gang-du's home in the final scene of the film is a medium shot of Se-joo, sleeping on a floor mat. For the first time, this domestic space actually feels like a home: there is a space for sleeping. The floor mat is an infusion of tradition while the box of noodle bowls in the corner demonstrates that this home is still also a business and so the West has not been completely cast out. A medium wide shot follows, revealing much of the space. It is much more spacious than before as the packages of goods no longer dominate the space and have been pushed to the periphery, mingling with items typically associated with a home, like a fan and coats. Deeper focus than seen earlier in the film provides depth to further illustrate that there is more space. The openness of the "new" Park home allows for it to function as a nurturing home in addition to a business. Before, it was more business than home, but now there is space for sleeping and eating—it has become a familial space rather than solely a space for commerce.

A short Korean-style table covered with a Korean dinner, including the numerous side dishes for which Korean cuisine is known, sits in the middle of the room. Gang-du sets the last of the food he has prepared on the table and wakes Se-joo up. They now eat with metal chopsticks instead of the disposable ones seen earlier in the film, another figuration of a traditional Korean voice as Koreans typically eat with metal chopsticks, not wood like most Asian cultures. While they inhabit the same space, the business and domestic realms are separated through Gang-du's relationship with food. The prepackaged foods that Gang-du and his father sold dominated both the business and domestic aspects of their home. They were what they sold, they dominated the space, and these commoditized food products were what the Parks ate. Now, the food exists in tandem with domestic furnishings and a line is drawn between business and home. Gang-du and Se-joo eat traditional home-cooked meals, not the prepackaged goods they sell.

At Se-joo's request, Gang-du turns off a news broadcast featuring American officials discussing the recent events of the "epidemic." Christina Klein, in her article "Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, or, Transnational Genres in the films of Bong Joon-ho," sees this action as the defining moment in an epilogue that she claims "inverts this hierarchy of American dominance and Korean submission" (890). She argues that in this scene, "Korean food symbolically displaces American media and language" (890). It is understandable from where this reading comes. Korean values seem to have been reinstated in this home and by turning off the television Gang-du silences a western voice. However, the voice of the West in the aesthetic dialogue of this home is not so literal. Their home is still a business, aligning it with western capitalism, and the mere presence of a television recalls the consumer electronics for which contemporary

South Korea is known the world over (e.g., Samsung and LG). Economic changes brought on by the West have contributed to changes in life style and eating habits that have made the processed foods that Gang-du sells popular. Family values have changed and so a home with a single parent and a lack of extended family is not uncommon. Despite what seems to be a newfound dominance of Korean values in Gang-du's home, his family is still broken—it has been shaped by inverted exile.

Rather than characterize this ending as an inversion of American dominance over South Korea, it more closely resembles the cathartic “rebirth with and against abjection” that Kristeva describes in her essay (31). Kristeva privileges an ambivalent relationship towards abjection, and through this ambivalence, creativity and freedom are possible. In regard to inverted exile, I characterized this ambivalence of “with and against” as negotiating a balance between sacrifice and exclusion. Gang-du's “cathartic rebirth” is the result of an active and critical relationship towards western influence in which he is able to sacrifice some of the pleasures of both a western Korea and Korean tradition in order to alleviate anxieties associated with both. At the same time, neither western influence nor traditional Korean culture are cast out and labeled other. Instead, Bong's film suggests an active and critical identity formation that combines these two forces through embracing the ambivalence of inverted exile. Gang-du's transformation from a slacker to a *feminized patriarch* reflects this process. Through his demonstration of masculinity in defeating the monster by penetrating its vaginal mouth with a large metal pole, Gang-du reasserts himself as a man and takes his traditional place as patriarch of the family. However, complications of inverted exile remain: he is a single parent and should take on the feminized role of a mother as well. His cooking of a traditional Korean meal

for Se-joo does not cast out American influence, but instead suggests a new role that ought to be taken in the face of a westernized Korea: the *feminine patriarch*. Just as working with and against abjection is described by Kristeva as a process, Korean identity formation is an ongoing process that takes in outside influence while also pushing against that same influence. Bong explores this process and the negative effects of working solely with or solely against Western influence through his melodramatic focus on domestic *mise-en-scène* and families.

The final shot of *The Host* demonstrates that Bong is suggesting an attitude towards western influence, not providing a clean answer. It is an extremely long shot of the Park home tiny, in the frame and the sole landmark in a snowy clearing. A light next to the building makes the snack shack/home a beacon of hope against the dark night sky. This suggests that the Park home is an individual example within Seoul (the lights of the city stand out along the dark horizon). Perhaps this is the only home that has found the process that works for them—the only one that works with and against western influence in an active and critical fashion? Or perhaps, this particular answer to the problems of inverted exile is an individual one and all the other homes in Seoul have to find their own way? Regardless, this final shot marks the Park home as special and suggests the possibility of the return of the monstrous for other homes that have not found their own balance of sacrifice and exclusion through a critical and active relationship with western influence. Gang-du's "cathartic rebirth" is an individualized experience that cannot simply be mapped onto homes throughout South Korea.

**Beyond *The Host*:
Inverted Exile and the Cinema of Change**

The Host reveals the ambivalence that is *inverted exile* within contemporary South Korea—shattering the veneer of progress. Inverted exile results when a country drastically changes around its citizenry in a short period of time. These changes put the culture's traditional values at odds with a new value set produced by the country's "development," causing alienation similar to that of the traditional exilic context. South Korea, in the latter half of the 20th Century, has, under the influence of the United States, changed from an agrarian culture ruled by decades of dictators to an industrial, western democracy. The influence of western capital has placed an emphasis on consumerism and individual comfort, putting a strain on Korea's traditional family values. Bong's film suggests the need for an active and critical relationship with inverted exile that embraces ambivalence—allowing one to partake in the desires of both a first world South Korea (e.g., personal freedoms, economic opportunities, et cetera) and traditional Korean culture (e.g., traditional cuisine, familial unity, et cetera), while also limiting the anxieties caused by both. *The Host* does this through *aesthetic dialogue*.

Aesthetic dialogue allows *The Host* to shatter the façade of progress and directly address the ambivalences of contemporary South Korean life. In an aesthetic dialogue, multiple historical, political, and social connotations are present at any given moment of the text. As an aesthetic dialogue, *The Host* brings South Korea's rural past into contact with the industrial present as well as pulling American and Japanese cultural forms into

contact with local Korean issues. Through this dialogue, the film is able to reveal inverted exile by unearthing a repressed history of oppressive governments, American exploitation, and familial unity that contradict the story of “progress” surrounding South Korea’s transformation into a global economic power.

I chose to explore the work of Bong Joon-ho because, to my mind, his films, especially *The Host*, most explicitly address the issues of inverted exile. My work is significant because it sheds light on a context that is rarely treated with the attention to ambivalence that is necessary. The story of South Korea’s “progress” is often taken at face value. Some, like Hsuan L. Hsu, try to combat this celebration of Korea’s success by denigrating the West’s influence over South Korea. Others, like Christina Klein, embrace ambivalence to an extent. Yet Klein’s reading of *The Host*’s epilogue as reinstating Korea’s power over western influence seems to abandon the critical ambivalence she formerly embraces. My approach allows the desires and anxieties surrounding change to inhabit the same space through dialogue. By doing so, I can get closer to ambivalences of inverted exile. In the first chapter, I argued that the film uses the feminized and ambivalent body of *The Host*’s monster, to suggest that by embracing the ambivalence of inverted exile a new unity and criticality can be achieved for South Koreans. This unity and criticality, as I argued in the second chapter, can be motivated towards acknowledging personal and state failures to actively shape a more nurturing nation. Finally, in the third chapter, I argued that through the unity and criticality gained by embracing the ambivalence of inverted exile, domestic gender roles can be trans-valued to create nurturing homes in the face of changing values.

Any number of projects addressing cultural artifacts of contemporary South Korea are possible follow-ups to my project. With my approach established for *The Host*, it would be possible to spend more time with Bong's other films, further developing my claims about Bong's work made in the body of this project. As I mentioned in my introduction, Park Chan-wook and Kim Ki-duk tend to receive more scholarly attention in the West than Bong, but I feel that Bong's films more explicitly address inverted exile. Using this project as a starting point, it would now be possible to address the aesthetic dialogues of Park and Kim to discover what their films suggest about inverted exile and how Koreans should deal with the changes of their homeland. As mentioned in Chapter One of this project, the monster movie is primarily an American and Japanese cultural form without a strong tradition in South Korea. Since *The Host*, two other Korean monster movies have been released internationally: *D-War* (2007) and *Chaw* (2010). Rather than focusing on an auteur, another project could focus on genre as an aesthetic dialogue that engages the ambivalence of inverted exile.

Inverted exile is not a context specific to South Korea. It results when a country's landscape, political system, and economic status have dramatically transformed within a generation and so my conclusions concerning inverted exile could be extended to other contexts. One example with a rich cinematic tradition is Weimar Germany. After its defeat in World War I, Germany drastically changed under the Weimar Republic (1919-1933)—transforming from a rural nation with a predilection for totalitarian rulers to a republic based around growing urban centers like Berlin. The political changes brought along cultural shifts as well. For example, in Berlin, active female sexuality and homosexuality were now longer quite so taboo. Like in contemporary South Korea,

outside cultural influence was a site of ambivalence. The intense sanctions placed on Germany by France following the war soured Germans to outside cultural imports and a growing anti-Semitic sentiment clashed with the blossoming film industry that flourished through the efforts of Jewish filmmakers or filmmakers of Jewish decent like Fritz Lang. Approaching these films as aesthetic dialogues of inverted exile can add to the already rich literature surrounding Weimar Cinema by approaching these films from a different perspective. Additionally, an inverted exilic study of Weimar Cinema, can only enrich my notion of inverted exile. By taking into consideration a context from the West and almost a century prior to New Korean Cinema, such a study would further flesh out the stakes and symptoms of inverted exile, including shifting values and a changing homeland.

Returning to the East, China can also be regarded as a site of inverted exile. Currently, China's rapid economic growth and potential for political reform produce anxiety over competition in the West, and can potentially become a situation of inverted exile for Chinese citizens. As China westernizes in order to compete economically and the landscape becomes increasingly urban, traditional values will likely suffer as they have in South Korea. China's "development" is/will become a source of ambivalence. Economic success also has the potential to spark a cinema boom that will garner international attention like those in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and now South Korea. It is possible that such a cinema boom would negotiate local Chinese culture with the influence of commercial cinema invading Chinese theaters from Hollywood, Japan, South Korea, and Hong Kong.

Ultimately, *The Host* is about change—the ambivalent change of inverted exile. Cultures experiencing inverted exile produce aesthetic dialogues that reveal the ambivalences of their contemporary moment. Inverted exile has certainly happened in nations other than South Korea (e.g., Weimar Germany) and will happen again (e.g., China). By placing the stakes of inverted exile on the table, my project can serve as a jumping off point for not only furthering the conversation surrounding Bong, *The Host*, and New Korean Cinema, by embracing ambivalence, but also for addressing past instances of inverted exile and avoiding the dangers of ignoring the ambivalences of future inverted exilic contexts.

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