Introduction

Arguments for the political efficacy of film have always held onto the idea that film must move off the screen into the world

Pratt and San Juan, 2014, p,13.

Cities, particularly large cities, were the places where the strangest mixtures of food and genes, money and words, were concocted

De Landa 2000, p. 211.

The postmodern city amounts to its posthumous continuation, its fractal form.

Clarke 2003, p. 94

Chinese Urban Shi-nema dives into what has aptly been named the *mise-en-scene* of Capitalism's Second Coming in China (Li 2016) to explore what becomes of Chinese societies, cities, and subjectivities during an unprecedented period of urban and economic generation and transformation. Situating itself in the historical aftermath of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and Shanghai's 2010 World Expo, we offer up a series of grounded case studies from within the processual city of Ningbo as it transitioned from being a second tier city to a 'new first tier city'; to generate a mosaic picture of how contemporary urban life in China is undergoing a series of radical changes, transformations and reorganisations (including 'genes, memes, norms and routines' (see e.g. Delanda 2000, p.212)) as new forms of consumer culture bed in. Harnessing a *pars pro toto* approach, we explore four very different architectural assemblages, or technostructural arrangements—including luxury real estate showrooms, a Pritzker

prize winning history museum, China's 'first and best' Sino-foreign university campus, and a series of gamified urban *non-spaces* (such as shopping malls and building sites) that channel the frenzied logic of so-called Casino Capitalism—that help cast light upon the broader picture sweeping up greater China during the most radical and rapid period of urban development and change the planet has ever witnessed.

Our *Realist* soundings of these different assemblages typically hone in on the psychophysiological experiences of various (domestic and alien) citizens that become transactionally incorporated into these newly emerging forms of affordance space, or what we might call after Le Corbusier urban 'machines for living' (1986: 95) indicative of a postsocialist phase of Chinese modernity. More specifically, the book's triangulation of philosophical concepts, empirical data, and ethnographic observations become mediated through a creative encounter between the Chinese concept of *shi* (势) and the human geographer David B. Clarke's notion of 'cinematicity'. *Shi* (势) is described by sinologist philosopher François Jullien as the inherent potentiality at work in configuration, or a '*potential born of disposition*' (1995, p.27), while the portmanteau 'cinematicity' blends theories of urbanism, cinema and contemporary capitalism (illuminating both the cinematic qualities of the city and the city on screen) with a sense of cinematic automaticity, implying something like the automatic thinking of the city by the cinema, and vice versa.

Paramount to this study is the emergence of new 'entrepreneurial cities' in China, which arrive in tandem with a historically new species of consumer citizens: Or, what Li after Foucault calls *homo economicus,* that "instrumentalist figure forged in the effervescent conditions of market competition" (Li 2016: 58). Keeping one eye on each, or a blend of bodies-cities (see e.g Grosz 1999), we here foreground contemporary examples of what we playfully call urban *shi*-nema (and more on which in chapter 1) which surface a historically unique sites/sights designed to direct and trigger a range of desired human (trans)actions, thoughts and feelings. Collectively, all four chapters we investigate reveal what in world of art criticism we might call 'significant forms' that in turn illuminate how China's external embrace of global capitalism, its internal promotion of consumer culture, and its attendant mnemonic

practices have radically (re)shaped modern life. Or put differently, the spaces we investigate appear to 'intend' something, or reveal both agency and intentions (often the extraction or transformation of force or bodies transacting with them) purposely or parametrically built into their material forms. These vary from 'apparatuses of capture' (to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's terminology 2004b) to bona fide artworks, whose arrangements of objects and qualities appear designed to move (or make act) or transform (change the status/capacities of) the human traffic that pass through them in a *profitable* way (both to make profit in the case of a show room in chapter 2, or to endow the profits of alternative perspectives of branded Western products as in chapters 3 and 4).

Chinese Urban Shi-nema thus works to isolate what we might call after Guy Debord (1981, p.53) four pivotal points of '4E psychogeographical' articulation in contemporary Ningbo (and more on which below) in a fashion designed to be at once *productively* alienating and defamiliarizing for (to momentarily speak like others) its Chinese and Western readers alike. Ruminate here that regarding our alien and alienating methods we are well aware that, for good or for bad, the practice generally known as 'psychogeography' has aptly been described as the 'science fiction of urbanism' (Asger Jorn quoted in Coverly 2010, p. 99). Indeed, as with Gilles Deleuze's descriptions of a goof book of philosophy being part detective novel, part science fiction, we take this to be a necessary step towards gaining new perspectives and ways of proceeding (see e.g. Deleuze 2004a, p.xix; 2004b, p. 162). Accordingly, we here push Debord's sci-fi method for producing fresh alien perspectives even further by moving them into new transformative mutating compositions with what have variously been called the new 'E-approaches' (the 'E' of *ecological*, meaning embodied, extended, embedded and enactive).

From these perspectives each chapter explores how different bundles of urban sensations and affects are constellated and arrayed in a manner designed to transactionally guide or manipulate certain outcomes. By such means *Urban Chinese Shi-nema* also acts as a form of provocation, then, that by setting itself the important but always difficult task of merging theoretical discussion with empirical analyses (while blending philosophical thought, empirical data, and (auto)ethnographic observations) is designed to help readers to perceive how the millennial urban China

is increasingly becoming cinematic, or rather as we will show in the next chapter, operating upon hyperreal *shi*-nematic principles.

Notes towards a method

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's dark exploration into the prevailing conditions of mental health and well being under a global system of 'absolute capitalism' asks readers to take the global proliferation of mass murders (emblemised by the actions of James Holmes, Anders Behring Breivik, Seung-Hui Cho, Eric Harris, Dylan Klebold, and Pekka-Erik Auvinen), and the global suicide pandemic more generally (including Wall Street bankers, Chinese factory workers toiling for Apple and Foxconn, Indian farmers trapped and enslaved by multinational GM corporations such as Monsanto, and French workers despairing under Orange's unethical manageralism) as the paradigmatic political expression of our epoch (2015). What he calls our 'dark zeitgeist' (Incidences of suicide also form a vector of our work and case studies, with both authors having witnessed or been made aware of various suicides and suicide attempts in the architectural assemblages considered in chapters 2, 4 and 5. For various reasons, both political and ethical, we opt to bracket these considerations on this outing, and instead make reference to Berardi's landmark work for an altogether different purpose.

Indeed, above and beyond the overwhelmingly dark picture Berardi extracts in *Heroes: Mass murder and suicide* (2015) from contemporary life under a system of global capitalism, there remains a ray of light that emerges courtesy of Berardi being convinced to travel to the East Asian city of Seoul to deliver a talk on his work. Of importance to our approaches here, during this trip Berardi outlines gaining a fresh perspective. He thereafter describes:

> Inspecting the faces of young people – their signs and gestures, and their ironic declarations of the T-shirts ('I'm easy but too busy for you') - I was impressed by the importance of design in Seoul's contemporary visual environment. The traces of traditional life are hidden, overtaken by the new designs of life. Social communication has been thoroughly redesigned by the

cellular smartphone. Vision has been thoroughly redesigned by screens of all sizes. (2015, p. 101)

Lingering on this last point he further notes how it suddenly struck that in fact: 'Screens are everywhere: big screens on the walls of skyscrapers, medium sized screens in the railway's stations lobby. But the small private screens of the smartphones demand the undivided devotion of the passing hordes, as they calmly and silently shuffle through the city, heads bowed' (p. 101). Such observations, triggered by an alienating encounter with an alien Asian urban ecosystem, chime and resonate with our experiences of living and working in the city of Ningbo China (albeit for a more extended period, just shy of a decade), wherein the convergence and synergy of screen-media and city life forced us to try and grasp something of what China, and the world of absolute techno-capitalism more generally, appears to be becoming today.

Accordingly, over a period that spanned 2010 to 2018 Ningbo became a space that helped each of us grasp and rethink how global capitalism is not so much a system or process that makes us all the same, but is rather a system that exploits and amplifies difference (in traditions, culture, infrastructure, but also differences in wealth, expectations, and thus changes the status and fortunes differently), not least by innervating different fits and bursts of change and growth in diverse geopolitical locales. These differences are key to this book. For those familiar with Western urban studies, museum studies, education, embodied cognition, and so on, our Chinese studies offer alternative alien studies that reveal differences that may provoke fresh thought and insight. To Chinese scholars and readers the book equally provides an alien or outsider's perspective on the nature of the ephemeral present. For those more familiar with a single disciplinary approach, our interdisciplinary melange of different perspectives and aspects is also hopefully alienating and challenging. We hope that in all cases this defamiliarsation and alienation is productive, as it was (reflexively speaking) for us.

So, while Berardi might note that there is today in Seoul, as is the case in Ningbo, an explosive proliferation of material screens everywhere, in our mosaic study we also aim to expose how the very principles and affects of cinema and screen media have

also become disarticulated from screen media per se, and moved into transformative co-composition with the very material fabric of China's contemporary urban psycho-geography. Realising or actualising something akin to a Baudrillardian **'universe of technologies of the screen in which there is no longer a distinction between the real and the imaginary' (Baudrillard 2014: 180).**

Notes on terminology 1: 'the cinema'

Chinese Urban Shi-nema finds us stretch everyday understanding of what cinema is, or does. For, although we always take care to frame our examples alongside real examples of cinema contemporaneous to them, or at least relevant to them, we essentially re-frame the 'cinema' as being far-more more than just films, and describe it as being something more akin to a mediating substratum of contemporary social reality and ontology. Or again, to paraphrase Jean Baudrillard from his book on *America*, it struck us that Ningbo (like other parallel Chinese city places today) appeared to 'have stepped right out of the movies,' and thus to grasp its secret, we should not simply 'begin with the city and move inwards towards the screen,' but also consider (Chinese) screens in order to concomitantly move 'outwards towards the city' (1988: 56).

Of course, strict definitions of what 'the cinema' *is* (or was, or is not) have necessarily varied depending upon where in space or time a given observer was situated, as well as the purposes of their analysis, and what perspectives they prioritised when enframing it (technological, economic, psychological, economic, social, political, ideological, philosophical, etc., etc.). For the purposes of *Chinese Urban Shi-nema* we try to deploy the term *cinema* in it's a broad and expansive (non-essentialist) way, recognising it as always-already referring to an ever-shifting and evolving confederate of material parts and socio-political-economic practices. Looking back, we are happy to follow in the footsteps of a philosopher like Jacques Ranciere who sees 'the cinema' as an artistic idea that predated 'the cinema as a technical means and distinctive art' (2006: 6). Echoes here of famous theoretical arguments that take Plato's allegory of the cave to mark the conceptual invention of the basic cinematic apparatus *avant la letter*, *a la* Jean Louis-Braudy, (1999). Sticking with caves, a

similar belief finds film-philosophical expression in Werner Herzog's *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010), which implies thorugh its (3D) form and content that a combination of wall paintings and ritualistic promethean illumination by our ancient ancestors within cave environs (here specifically the Chauvet caves in France) unearth an 'architectural' form of proto-cinematic art linked to the 'birth of the modern mind'—some 30,000 years before Plato and the Greeks.

For some, such views no doubt simply expand a now century-old discourse that commonly frames the cinema as the ultimate 'bastard art.' Which is to say, a 'complete artform' that gradually came to re-combine, re-mediate, or expressively revision the properties, features and capacities of older art forms and practices such as painting, literature, music, dance, theatre, sculpture, opera, etc., etc. In expressing a similar position the philosopher Alain Badiou describes the cinema as a paradigmatic 'parasitic bastard art' which 'amalgamates the other arts without, for all that, actually presenting them' (Ling 2010, 35). And here we are also happy to adopt the views of a philosopher of film like Berys Gaut, who also houses modern cognate screen-forms (such as videogames and television) that were historically derived from the cinema (the first screen of modernity) under the same category-canopy (without negating their obvious differences and specificities too, and more on which throughout). For there is no doubt that certain eddies and feedback loops become erected through these forms. To similar ends, Badiou frames the cinema as a bastard mode that likewise borrows and amalgamates features, parts and processes from distinctly non-art worlds too, especially technological, industrial and scientific tools and procedures (we can think here of contributions from photochemical processes, lens technologies, electrical circuits, industrial practices, digital computing, and so on). Going further still, if theorists such Braudy took the cinema as a technological actualisation or metamodelling of human perception and thought (1999), other thinkers and philosophers expanded such views by framing the universe itself as a form of 'metacinema' (see e.g. Bergson, Deleuze, Bogue, Pisters).

With respect to older blends of artistic and non-art forms that appear remediated by cinema, in chapter two we pick up and develop an idea developed by the formalist Soviet filmmaker and film-philosopher Sergei Eisenstein, who argued that pre-cinematic practices such as architecture (part art, part craft, part industry) were always already proto-cinematic in their form, function, and affects/effects: A view that led

him to describe the Acropolis of Athens as an example of an 'ancient film' (1989, p. 112), the experiential ecological form and content of which ultimately helped (aesthetically and epistemologically) nudge (Western?) human cultures along the (for Eisenstein, historical or teleological) road towards the invention of the cinema.[i] If in these models architecture leads towards cinema, in chapter 2 we look at how architecture emerging in a world after cinema, if you will, is further changed and transformed by the ways in which cinema provokes viewers to think and feel about issues of time and history.

With such perspectives in mind, our notion of 'the cinema' might thus be imagined operating somewhat like a 'machinic phylum' (Guattari 1984, p120). That is, an abstracted or self-contained unity or virtual phase space, under the threshold of which various actual technological classes and species can be understood emerging and adapting (to specific ecological milieus). As our engagements with the likes of Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and Jonathan Beller also make clear, though, we also take the cinema to be a form of symbiotic fantasy machine that serves to get in-between or mediate imagination and reality, inside and outside. And it is at this level where we begin our theory building in chapter 1.

Notes towards a Vertiginous Method

'The cinema' is a techno-art practice or industrial praxis that has undoubtedly catalysed impact upon the world around it. In his *Cinema by Other Means* (2012)*,* to take but one inspirational example, Pavle Levi takes the dialectical interplay the cinema has reaped upon other arts and avant garde practices around it as the focus of his study, exposing how these often work to re-materialise and re-mediate the cinema by their own embodied means. More generally, the cinema as medium or mode has displayed a transformative impact on urban subjectivity and the lived or perceived world. In his landmark essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' for example, Walter Benjamin famously expanded and refreshed the idea of the cinema radically re-configuring human sense perceptions, noting that 'The film corresponds to profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus' which not only become 'experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street,' but also 'on a historical scale by every present-day citizen' (Benjamin 1969: 26). Which is to

say, as Daniel Reynolds puts it in his recent *Media in Mind* (2019), because 'minds are ecological phenomena,' and technologies such as cinema essentially help structure the modes of seeing and feeling of those encountering/using them, we must remain aware that 'as the world changes, minds change with it' (Reynolds 2019: 50-54).

And the worlds of critical and philosophical thought have not escaped this remediated cinematisation either. For, to take but one thinker to whom we will return throughout this book as an illustrative case in point, Jean Baudrillard has variously described his own theoretical method as constituting a form of 'camera movement' or 'tracking shot' with regard to the subject-objects of his work (Baudrillard 2015: 12, 13, 35). So, to recapitulate before moving on , *Urban Chinese Shi-nema* constitutes a productive exercise in cinematic-driven-thinking, that asks readers to think contemporary Chinese urban life and lifestyles through and *with* the lens of cinema; which we frame as a particularly privileged site/sight of concrescence, or growing together, from the in-between of the modern Chinese city and its citizenry. To such ends we also forward a detoured notion of *cinematicity* with unique Chinese characteristics (what we will relate in the next chapter as *shi*-nematic assemblages) that become palpable within and across different scales of register—ranging from the individual, through various collective groups, up to and including a national community (a statistical population of many millions).

And it would be fair to say that at times during the development of this book, the sheer magnitude of trying to bridge—let alone synthesise—these different scalar levels of analysis has on occasion given the authors the odd unsettling feeling of vertigo. But reflecting upon these feelings inevitably brought us by degrees back to the cinema, and specifically what some see as cinema's Ur text: *Veritgo* (Alfred Hitchcock USA, 1958)—the form of which can help us to here visualise certain aspects of our method before we advance. Indeed, the critical method developed hereafter might be fruitfully thought as actualising a form of (what in the study of film is sometimes referred to as a 'dolly zoom' or) '*Vertigo* effect': A visceral visual technique made famous by the master of cinema Alfred Hitchcock, which entails the compositing or collapsing together of a rapid pull of focus (typically using wide-angle lenses in camera to adjust the angle of view) and a simultaneous back tracking dolly movement in a single take. In chapters two through five, for example, we expressly fold together a focusing zoom on different urban phenomena (so that we can keep

sight of their specific differences and singular details), while concomitantly undertaking a contextualising backtrack that allows us to simultaneously frame their contours and operations in relation to a broader horizon and changing bigger picture.

Closely linked to this dynamic of zooming and backtracking is another useful concept, or image of thought, we borrow from the intersecting worlds of mathematics and philosophy: *the fractal*. We will go into the specificities of this modelling in more detail in the following chapter, but for now we want to note *en passant* that a fractal is a self-same repeating pattern, or a nested set of sets, whose patterning recurs or repeats at different scales of observation or register. The dynamic fractal model we outlay (which should not be taken as being closed, fixed, or stable) is directly tied to our *Realist* modelling of social ontology (distant echoes here of Alain Badiou's formulation of 'mathematics = ontology' (2007)); which as encountered in the work of materialist thinkers such as Manuel DeLanda, helps us bridge the 'link between the micro- and the macro-levels of social reality' (including the intermediary of the meso-level, see e.g. De Landa 2006: 4-5). Drawing heavily on the dynamic material philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari, DeLanda describes cities as ecological 'assemblages of people, networks, organizations, as well as of a variety of infrastructural components, from buildings and streets to conduits for matter and energy flows' (2006, p.6) where different kinds of catalytic replicators and converters such as 'genes, memes, norms, routines' all get mixed up in nonlinear recodings (see DeLanda 2000, p. 212). DeLanda also encourages us to view cities as assemblages of matter-energy undergoing phase transitions of various kinds, with each new layer of accumulated "stuff" simply enriching the reservoir of nonlinear dynamics and nonlinear combinatronics available for the generation of novel structures and processes' (2000: 21).

If the city constitutes one level of study, closely linked to this is the co-built subjectivity of the postsocialist Chinese citizen, which is increasingly the product of urban experience. Which is to say, we here recognise a form of entangled or transactional relationship emerging between the city and its urban subjects. Of course, in the language of contemporary Physics or continental philosophy we might concede that we are always already materially *entangled* with our world, or it reciprocally with us. However, unlike other animals, as far as we are aware, the human species more

frequently fills its lived environment with ever-new forms of tools and machines, or what Michel Serres refers to as 'Exo-Darwinian' drivers, that help to mould and reshape the individuals and populations that originally moulded them (Serres 2018, p. 45ff). Today, under advanced systems of hyper fast techno-capitalism, human habitations and urban spaces the world over are increasingly designed as commercial and corporate spaces. Which is to say, they have been conceived and built to be machinic-spaces of techno-capitalist *transaction*: A concept that we use in two distinct but overlapping ways throughout this book.

Indeed, while the notion of 'transaction' most commonly refers to a commercial system of exchange, typically of goods for cash, or increasingly services for money or monetised data, we also here deploy the term with a philosophical and critical shade. For, we evoke a conceptual notion of trans-actions whereby the borders between inside and outside, subject and object, human and media, become blurred and smudged. Tied to which, we find it more fitting to say that corporate worlds increasingly desire human beings to become *incorporated* (as well as immersed or entangled) into them, or that modern machines for living intend to *incorporate* collective and individuals and desires into them. Echoes here no doubt of Guy Debord's observation that a society that 'moulds all of its surroundings has developed a special technique for shaping its very territory, the solid ground of this collection of tasks': Or that '[u]rbanism is capitalism's seizure of the natural and human environment; developing logically into absolute domination,' so that capitalism ultimately remakes 'the totality of space into its own setting' (Debord 1983, p. 169).

Drawing inspiration from the influential assemblage models and methods of Elizabeth Grosz, we thus approach the corporeal body as a form of 'socio-cultural artefact' that provides the material conditions for contemporary subjectivity (381). Grosz's models were in part developed as a critique of causal and representational models of the body/city relationship, which granted precedence to one or other of the elements in the pair. Against these, Grosz projected a third way that recognises only transitory moments of connection and co-composition:

there is a two-way linkage which could be defined as an *interface*. What I am suggesting is a model of the relations between bodies and cities which sees them, not as megalithic total entities, distinct identities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings (Grosz 1999: 385)

Ningbo becomes the throbbing and dynamic assemblage we use as the focalizer of this book. Or more precisely, our *pars pro toto* approach isolates four embedded forms of urban assemblage emerging within millennial Ningbo that each appear to express something important about the contemporary Chinese city, and by extension the phase transition currently impacting it and its subjects becomings. Without providing any spoilers, this is first and foremost related to new forms of consumerism and consumer culture linked to China's embrace of global capitalism. Thus, while something like Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* presented Paris as 'Capital of the 19th Century,' and cities such as Berlin and New York have come to embody and express the prevailing economic and political logic of the 20th Century (see e.g DeLanda 2000, p.92), our book does something similar for China and its 21st Century city-building drives: albeit specifically harnessing Ningbo as a grounded case in point that can help illustrate how on-going processes of urbanisation allow second and first tier Chinese cities to emerge as the capital case of 21st Century cine-city life. In seeing China as 'where the action is' in terms of the future of hyperreal capitalism, we here provide a series of detailed soundings of contemporary culture, specifically surrounding the emergence and proliferation of heterogeneous commercial and consumerist structures that 'add themselves to the mix of previously existing ones, interacting with them, but never leaving them behind as a prior stage of development (although, perhaps, creating the conditions for their disappearance)' (DeLAnda 2000, p. 271).

What is more, if in the Western context the coming together of urban spaces and consumer politics resulted in the emergence of 'postmodernist' cities during the 20th century, which Clarke describes as being "less an identifiable city than a group of concepts – census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei" (2003, p.94) we report back on similar phenomena currently defining the operations and

topology of what we might for reasons of symmetry here call 'postsocialist' Chinese cities[ii]. For at least the embrace of global capitalism and consumer politics has resulted in the emergence of new *forms* of city in China, which differ greatly from older forms of feudal city, or Communist city, and we explore here by showing how contemporary Ningbo has become something like the postsocialist city's '*posthumous continuation, [in] its fractal form*' (Clarke 2003: 94).

Ningbo-a-go-go

What is a city? For Grosz it is an important ingredient in social constitution of the body, constituting 'a complex and interactive network that links together, often in an unintegrated and ad hoc way, a number of disparate social activities, processes, relations, with a number of architectural, geographical, civic, and public relations.' (1999: 382). In its material form, the city also serves to bring together power networks, economic flows, particular 'forms of management and political organization, interpersonal, familial, and extra-familial social relations, and the aesthetic/economic organization of space and place to create a semi-permanent but everchanging built environment or milieu' (Grosz 1999: 382). Linked to such, DeLanda notes how historians regularly highlight that 'urbanization has always been a discontinuous phenomenon' defined by fits and bursts wherein periods of 'rapid growth are followed by long periods of stagnation' (2000, p. 29). Unquestionably, the past decade has been a period of rapid growth for Ningbo (previously known as Ningpo in English), which remains a sub-provincial port city located in Zhejiang Province in China's northeast. For the purposes of this book we take Ningbo to be what we might call a form of *universal Singular* (the 'singular entity which persists as the universal in the multitude of its interpretations' (Žižek 2007a, p. xii), which can serve as a singular example indicative of concomitant trends unfolding in parallel places within the PRC more broadly).

Ningbo, which roughly translates as 宁, *ning* 'serene' or 'tranquil' and 波, *bo* 'waves' or 'waters' markets itself as being one of China's oldest historical cities, originally dating from around 4800 BCE, and it remains one of the busiest and deepest working

ports in the world today (the giant Ningbo-Zhoushan port). As part of the then second tier city's millennial drive towards modernisation, the University of Nottingham was invited to set up their overseas campus there in 2004, making it the first Sino-foreign university to open its doors in China. The authors of this book began working there in 2010 (a census year that recorded a growing population of over 7 million people living in Ningbo) and 2013 respectively, living and working during a period of rapid change and urban development, which as of 2017 saw the entrepreneurial city become recognised as one of China's 'new first-tier cities' (see e.g O'Donnell 2017).

The screenscapes of Ningbo thus serves as the empirical, (auto)ethnographic and ficto critical setting of this book, which explores a series of nested architectural worlds, consumerist worldings, or postsocialist set ups that appeared as part of this change, and we believe offer acute insights into the changing relations between the city, cinema, citizens and CCP during a historical phase transition catalysed by China's embrace of capitalism and incumbent consumerist politics.

Structure of approach

Chapter 1 is a historical, theoretical and methodological chapter which works to set up our later case studies. This chapter sketches out how theory and empirical data become articulated and synthesised. There, beyond setting context, we work to define a series of four or so interrelating concepts important to the later chapters and case studies, first outlining what we mean by Cinematicity and Shi-nema, before going on to describe our Realist fractal modelling of Chinese life, and what we mean by 4E Psychogeographic approaches. After this Theory chapter, which sets out the methodological matrix or *mise-en-scene* for all our subsequent analyses, we embark on four different case studies.

As is almost customary for books inspired by or written in the wake of *A Thousand Plateaus* 2004b, we admit that our book could pretty much be picked up and read in any order the reader sees fit. A reader with a research interest in Chinese museums might want to go directly to chapter 3, for example. Another interested in commercial manipulation might go straight to chapter 2 and 5, while yet another interested in

corporate universities or transnational higher education may start with chapter 4. However, admitting this, our suggested structure has a certain amount of intent and functionality built into it, with each chapter's openings, closing, focusings, and backtracks forming a broader pattern or series of movements that build momentum and carry forward meanings and understanding form one to the other.

Here, in anticipation of our engagement with Chinese concept of *shi* in the following chapters and in recollection of the restless twisting murmurations of sparrows that often kept us transfixed out of our office windows in the Nottingham-Ningbo campus, we would like to quote at length a useful passage offered by Hans-Georg Gadamer regarding the 'Play of Art' (1995). This is a description of conscious experience which we feel resonates both with our nonlinear structuring of this book at the same time as it suggests a fruitful mode of advancing through it.

> Experiencing like breathing is a rhythm of intaking and outgivings. Their succession is punctuated and made a rhythm by the existence of intervals, periods in which one phase is ceasing and the other is inchoate and preparing. William James aptly compared the course of a conscious experience to the alternate flights and perchings of a bird. The flights and perchings are intimately connected with one another; they are not so many unrelated lightings succeeded by a number of equally unrelated hoppings. Each resting place in experience is an undergoing in which is absorbed and taken home the consequences of prior doing, and, unless the doing is that of utter caprice or sheer routine, each doing carries in itself meaning that has been extracted and conserved. As with the advance of an army, all gains from what has been already effected are periodically consolidated, and always with a view to what is to be done next. If we move too rapidly, we get away from the base of supplies—of accrued meanings—and the experience is flustered, thin, and confused. If we dawdle too long after having extracted a net value, experience perishes of inanition (Gadamer 1995, p.74)

Our first perching after our theory and history chapter lands in the world of high end lifestyle consumerism and apartment building/buying. Indeed, Chapter 2: Commercial

Overground *Shi*-nema frames a series of ephemeral architectural assemblages designed to advertise and sell luxury apartments alongside contemporaneous examples of what Chris Berry calls 'aspirational realist' cinema—the romantic versions of which unabashedly promote consumerist lifestyle to a growing female demographic that represents an increasingly important economic force within contemporary China. The contemporaneous architectural forms that we zoom in on in this chapter help illuminate how similar messages and affects recombine with other cinematic principles. These have become disarticulated from the medium of cinema and put to work in different ways within contemporary Ningbo streets: specifically, in order to increase the efficacy of real estate showroom settings. We thus explore the effects of affectively distributed networks of human, architectural, technological and nonhuman forces and "actors" that appear to be arranged in such a way as to manipulate and impact the thoughts, feelings, and (trans)actions of potential buyers.

Albeit in saying all this, as various studies have clearly demonstrated, the distribution of real estate ownership is a decidedly gendered process in contemporary China, which asymmetrically favours married male purchasers and ownership; with women most often being deliberately excluded or left out of the biggest accumulation of real estate wealth in history, thanks to the resurgence and state backed patrilinear gender norms within the Chinese system (See e.g. Fincher 2014). With respect to this, it may be of interest that central to this study is a local (then unmarried) Ningbonese woman that was visiting showrooms around the city with the goal of purchasing real estate. This key participant granted us access to the photos and video clips she had taken during her showroom tours to naturally document her apartment-buying experience and shared with us the promotional posters, leaflets, flyers and web links that she had either procured from the different sites or had been sent to her social media accounts. To add to this archival data, we subsequently joined our key participant on several return visits to the showrooms, occasioning further photos and note taking, as well as videos of our her inside the showroom context, allowing us to both reconstruct and observe first hand the contrived ecologies and patterns of interaction taking place in at least five such showrooms, including the showroom where she committed to the purchase of her boutique apartment. Recognising these showrooms as instances of commercial overground *shi*-nema—wherein the cinema and city have become co-determining and mutually enabling sites/sights that generate the power to manipulate

and impact the thoughts, feelings and actions of potential buyers—helps best expose the effectiveness of these modern urban assemblages.

Chapter 3: In-dependent Art *Shi*-nema we thereafter explore two truly singular artworks emerging from the distinct creative universes of urban architecture and art cinema. To wit, Wang Shu's Ningbo Historic Museum (2008) and Jia Zhangke's Shanghai World Expo film *Hai shang chuan qi/I Wish I Knew* (2010). These are here framed as being artistic expressions undergirded by a homologous 'abstract diagram.' For, the former is built out of the remaining fragments of an old city that was bulldozed to make way for newer commercial high-rise complexes (such as those being sold in chapter 1), while the latter is a state commissioned film that continues the auteur director's fascination with the processes of change and destruction marking China's ruthless drive towards urban modernisation. The chapter works to show how although using completely different media, the two artworks utilise a common ethico-aesthetic tactic in order to critique the very processes their commissioners pay them to celebrate. To help explain how, this chapter adopts a repurposed notion of assemblage theory that is put into creative dialogue with the Chinese notion of *shi* to help us to perceive how these two outstanding farrago projects, with their rough and broken edges, become responsible for introducing discordant mental relations into China's processual cityscapes. Viewing both works as state-sanctioned vehicles of Chinese 'modernity,' chapter 3 thus explores how Wang and Jia's affective repurposing of urban detritus or salvaged cinematic material concomitantly allow their sensational *shi*-nematic works to emit critical signals that subtly decompose the political 'main melodies' associated with the state's embrace of modernization. Drawing on a hybrid model of Deleuze's image regimes from *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* further permits us to perceive exactly how these macropolitical 'monuments' politically condemn the temporal and teleological narratives of progress that their commissioners charge them with celebrating.

Chapter 4 opts to rest in the campus world of a transnational higher education institute located in Ningbo. This chapter, entitled 'Sci-Fi *Shi*-nema' uses contemporaneous Chinese films featuring 'neoliberal subjects' and hyperreal architectural simulacra alongside Western Science fiction films as its inspiration, even if the latter has ostensibly been a missing genre in Chinese cinema since the founding of the republic

in 1949. For, alongside a consideration of Chinese films such as Zhang Yuan's Fengkuang yingyu/*Crazy English* (1999), Jia Zhang-ke's *Shije/The World* (2004), and Chen Kaige's *Sou suo/Lost in the Web* (2012) this chapter also utlises Western science fiction films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *Westworld* (1973) to help frame the marketing and selling of alien 'education experiences' in contemporary China to its local population. Specifically, we here dive into one of the most successful and well-known architectural ensembles, a Sino-foreign venture which some commentators from education and linguistics have disparaged as 'little more than an academic themepark' (Jenkins, 2011: 933), viewing this as representative of the latest wave of Western University franchise models currently doing business in the PRC. While the popularity of this Glocalised Western education model has expanded over the last decade (Knight, 2013), we dive into the space of modern era's self-proclaimed "first and best" Sino-alien university, whose 'yellow earth' was tellingly broken by Tony Blair's New Labour representative John Prescott.

In this chapter we not only explore how the architecture and buildings themselves function as spectacular simulacra of other simulacral buildings from a western elsewhere—and have since become the representative and representational façade within many different Chinese media products, including aspirational adverts, soap operas, and films— but also how the actions, and gestures of the student-centred-learning interactive-teaching staff and the paying customers/students have become subsumed within, and infected by, a larger network of *shi*-nematic gestures and (trans)actions associated with life under Chinese 'Capitalist Realism' (Fisher 2010). The analyses in this chapter draw on: auto ethnography; the university's publically available promotional materials (including their own media propaganda, such as *Jack Ma, The World Invites You*); examples of real technology-enhanced and Starbucks-endorsed classroom interaction made available through an open-access corpus of the university's English language samples; interviews conducted with various past and present members of the student and staff bodies. Throughout, we also strive to situate our discussions of this material within a broader picture surrounding the desires, drives and realities of universities, researchers, and students in the context of education ideologies, language policies, and global capitalism.

To emphasise the interactive, participatory, and ecological dimensions of cinematicity, Chapter 5 '*Shi*-nematic games' examines different forms of casino-like gamifications of consumption taking place within uniquely Chinese 'non-places' or 'any-nowhere-spaces' (Fleming 2014) emblematic of globalization in millennial Ningbo. That is to say, among other things we examine the natural history of a new shopping mall as it evolves from an empty lot-cum-building-site to a smooth and sleek aspirational environment where visitors can shop, purchase Apple products, and consume Starbucks against the backdrop of a Southeast Asian tropical island theme. Another corpus of recordings – including participant observation and digital promotional materials – is analysed here, allowing us to identify how a series of participatory games indicative of Casino Capitalism more generally are used to transform players into buyers, and buyers into players (paradoxically in a state space that otherwise outlaws casinos and gambling). The diversity of our ethnographic materials helps evaluate the experience and impact of these shinematic games from the different worldviews and roles of the actors in the evolving mall network, including property moguls, interior design companies, commercial tenants, migrant workers, customers (accompanied by grandparents and children), and a range of non-human animals that also become part of the material and semiotic assemblage. And while we might draw some comparison to films such as *The Hunger Games*, we here again re-frame "cinema" as being far more than just films, and recognise it as being akin to the substratum of contemporary social perceptions, and desires. This chapter draws parallels between the dramas that play out during the development and inside of such malls and the staging of various games for TV, ranging from morality-lesson board games (e.g. Monopoly, Snakes and Ladders), and syndicated game shows (e.g. The Price is Right, Wheel of Fortune) to the Reality TV Shows popular in today's attention economy (e.g. I'm a Celebrity, Voice of China). Delving into these overlaps allows us to better identify the winners and losers or *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* of millennial China's cinematicity – but also to view these malls as symptomatic of an increasingly normalised landscape that highlights economic disparities, mental health issues, environmental damage, and the abuse of other animals. We connect our findings back to previous chapters through parallels to the casino-like scenes inside the real estate showrooms (Overground Shinema) and, because one of the promotional

drives is timed to occur with the ancient QiXi Festival (七夕节日), we go beyond art-history to Chinese mythology (Art Shinema).

We now invite our readers to hop through these different sites, where they can perch momentarily to explore. As per Gadamer, meanings therein await to be extracted and consequences to be absorbed, conserved and carried forwards or backwards. The next chapter contains the historical and theoretical fodder for this course of conscious experience.

Chapter 1: *Shi*-story and Theory

'… it is only through shi *that one can get a grip on the process of reality'*

François Jullien 1995, p.31

'Stupid and unreal film fantasies are the daydreams of society…'

Siegfried Kracauer 1995, p. 292.

This theory chapter tasks itself with introducing and setting out four overlapping concepts that impact, or intraface with, the four case studies that follow. These include what we mean by our conceptulisation of Cinematicity, which we begin to expand on below as we move towards a related discussion of what we mean by Chinese urban Shi-nema. We thereafter attempt to set out our fractalized Realist approach to different scales of analysis, wherein individuals, cities, and nation states can be considered as being incorporated and embedded within each other. Finally, aligned with these, we shall speak to our transactional 4E Psychogeographical approaches to the individual-milieu-continuum and how this informs our various

ethnographic (and ficto critical autoethnographic) studies. These primarily being devised and used to help us map out the coextensive nature of cinema and capitalism within China today and iron out the wrinkles between theoretical and empirical approaches to our subject.

Regarding the cinematiization of cities and life.

If we were to try and describe istil the ever-expanding corpus of interdisciplinary work that gravitates around the liminal space situated in-between the cinema and the city, the city and the cinema, we might assert that: *The cinema and the city coil into a Möbius strip*. If not a twisted Latham Loop (see e.g Levi 2012 p. xi). Consider here Paul Virilio's argument that after the invention of the cinema the 'screen abruptly became the city square' (Virilio 2002: 447)**.** An idea that has been sensed and sounded out since the coming of the talking pictures, including in the now famous critique of the culture industry by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer who grumbled that the filmgoer increasingly perceives street outside the cinema as a continuation of the film he has just left. Because: 'Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies' (1997, p. 126). A view that anticipates and resonates with Baudrillard's arguments that first we increasingly inhabit a simulated or hyperreal world where positing any meaningful distinction between the false and true is virtually impossible (Baudrillard 2014: 162). In the US Baudrillard noted 'that life in America can be considered as a film, a movie, and you cannot distinguish between a movie and America. You cannot experience things beyond this hyperreality of films, signs and so on to get to its core, its reality' (Baudrillard 2014: 162). An idea taken in a different direction by later radical thinkers such as Vilem Flusser, who noted—well before the emergence of Facebook, Instagram or the selfie, mind—that in the photographic and the cinematographic age, everyone leads their lives 'as though under a magic spell for the benefit of cameras' (Flusser 1983: 48). Echoes here too of Gilles Deleuze's assertion that the world increasingly looked to us like a (bad) film (Deleuze, 2005b, p. 166), and David B. Clarke's notion that we now 'move through the world left in the wake of cinema' (2007, p. 29). But how literally should we take such ideas? To probe this, let us flashback and montage a few examples to help set us on our theoretical way.

1935: From Zunyi to New York and Beijing, via Hollywood

In 1935, while resting in the city of Zuunyi (遵义) during the Long March, Mao Zedong was elected to chairman of the Communist Politburo, becoming defacto leader of the Red Army. In that same year, while recovering from an illness in a New York hospital, the sociologist Marcel Mauss became distracted by his nurses, and in particular the familiarity of their gestures. He recalls asking himself where he might have previously 'seen girls walking as my nurses walked?' And thereafter records: 'I had the time to think about it. At last I realized that it was at the cinema. Returning to France, I noticed how common this gait was, especially in Paris; the girls were French and they too were walking in this way. In fact, American walking fashions had begun to arrive over here, thanks to the cinema' (Mauss 1973: 72). Comparable ideas find support in Dana B. Polan's assertion that folks increasingly learned 'to kiss, to talk, to live, according to the shadows [of cinema]' and furthermore that screen worshippers increasingly came to take 'the flickers on the screen' as the standard of their own reality (Polan in Beller 2006: 3; see also Morin 1957).

While such scenarios might from today's vantage recall something like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, USA, 1956, a science fiction narrative that touts on propagandistic fears of US citizens becoming mindless Communist zombies), under the chairmanship of Mao Hollywood cinema was banned within Communist China, in an attempt to block its polluting effect upon Chinese people. Historically Leftist thinkers and KNT (Kuomintang or Chinese) nationalists had previously set the scene for such views, framing Hollywood cinema as a contagious mode, a noxious form of 'spiritual pollution,' tantamount to the latest Imperial opium for the masses (see e.g Ying Hong in Su 2011, 191), designed to pacify and corrupt the minds and bodies of the Chinese. Of course, such anti-American views were common outside China too, with European leftists such as Herbert Ihering warning in 1926 that the Hollywood film was more dangerous than Prussian militarism: with millions of people being rendered passive and uniform after becoming "co-opted by American taste" (Ihering in Stam 2000: 64). Sharing a similar perspective, Mao accordingly blocked the celluloid Trojan horse of Western Imperialism—that promoted hedonism and individualism—from projecting its contagious images upon PRC's screens for the

next thirty years (see e.g. Ying Hong in Su 2011, p. 191; Xiao 2010 p. 68-9; Zhu & Nakajima 2010, p.18). Chinese cinema was to play a different political and pedagogical role.

Theoretical Frameworks

This broader becoming cinema of culture can also be linked to Sigfried Zielinski's notion of a medium's 'vanishing point,' associated at once with the dramatic emergence or disappearance of a form, as when the cinema suddenly burst onto the scene only to undergoes an on-going series of 'deaths' (like a horror monster in a modular series of sequels). Or, as Evan Calder Williams more recently renders it:

> the vanishing point signals a process where the energies and techniques of putatively different media become both ubiquitous and entangled, shaping how we see and take on all the tensions, forces and flows that come with them. […] in other words, this vanishing point marks the way that something becomes unseen not because it has been replaced or faded in importance, but because it has become naturalised, a structure and a given, as we forget how it was to have been otherwise (Williams 2017 17)

Beyond the iconoclastic work of Guy Debord and Baudrillard, the most pointed arguments of this type of argument about a cinematic culture or spectacle society today arguably belong to Jonathan Crary and Jonathan Beller, who each expose the historical remaking of human perception and consciousness associated with images and what Beller calls the 'cinematicity of capital' (Beller, 2006, p. 12-28). In *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, for example, Beller charts the ways in which a process of becoming-image—associated with the evolution of capitalism—began inculcating the 'cinematization of social relations' and 'the cinematization of the subject' throughout the 20th century (2006, p. 14, p. 26). An idea that also enjoys a different vector of approach in Crary's exploration new attention economies, whereby the act of looking (and the co-extensive desire to be seen) increasingly became labour (2001). All of which to say, the cinema and its cognate screen media have since the

19th century increasingly offered 'the emerging paradigm for the total reorganisation of society and (therefore) the subject' under capitalism (2006, p.13).

In the Chinese context this seems more true today than it does in the West. We therefore adapt these model to here allow us to better detect an intensification of the historical reconstruction of perception and attention, courtesy of more radical 'social and economic shifts with new representational practices, and with a sweeping reorganization of visual/auditory culture' (Crary 2001, p.2). By similar coin, we expand Crary and Beller's historical arguments to show how 'capital as an evolving system of organisation, production, and *exploitation*' has now become cinematic in the contemporary Chinese context (Beller, 2006, p. 22). Our argument thus also illustrates that within modern Chinese cultures where visuality (including as transparency) increasingly reigns, 'social theory needs to become film theory,' albeit with distinctive Chinese characteristics.

Towards Chinese Cinematicity

Articulating such debates to the Chinese context has already been a latent theme undergirding much Chinese cinema-city scholarship. In his *Economy, Emotion, and Ethics in Chinese Cinema*, for example, David Leiwei Li points to how a '[n]eoliberal logic is incomplete without its corresponding aesthetics,' which he specifically links to the radical transformations in Chinese urban space, which increasingly was designed to promote 'a kindred form of perceiving the world and a structure of consumptive pleasure befitting an economy of the spectacle' (Li 2016 p. 169). Consider also in this light the very ending of Victor Fan's *Cinema Approaching Reality* (2015) where –after literally and metaphorically 'shanghaing' classical 'Western' film theory by passing it through the defamiliarising prisms of Chinese and Buddhist philosophies– Fan unbuttons Andre Bazin's famous ontological question regarding 'What is Cinema?' in order to repose it as an enigmatic Zen-like riddle concerning 'What is not cinema?' (p. 222). In this chapter our consideration of Chinese urban landscapes gesture towards the very heart of this problem, for if we are to follow Fan in his claims that Chinese theorists understood cinema is a medium and practice that is forever 'approaching the real', we hereafter foreground how the

opposite appears ever more true today, in that the new urban realities of China increasingly betray a complementary movement towards becoming cinema(tic).

In making what may be to some such outlandish claims, we might here begin to build on a broad but thin seam of cinema-city works that engage and explore notions of *cinematicity* (see inter alia Clarke, 2016; Geiger and Littau, 2013; Williams, 2013, 2016). However, while the majority of works penned in this grain still tend to use films as their starting point for considering the cinema's 'automatic thinking of the city' (Clarke, 2016, p.3) in a gesture in keeping with Debord, Beller and Baudriallrd's explorations of the becoming-image capitalist hyperreality this book also foregrounds the opposite, by beginning with the modern city's own affective intent or quasi 'film thinking' (to purloin Daniel Frampton's terminology). If one framing of these cinematicity debates demonstrates that the 'criticality of film is thought and made to work through urban space,' (Pratt and San Juan, 2014, p.7), we wish to explore the complementary reverse shot (as such), wherein we can unearth urban settings being configured in such a way as to direct human actors to perform and (re)act in designated pre-desired ways within, and because of, contrived affective film-like situations. Indeed, to take but one point advanced by Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San as our departure point, we might note that if film truly does operate as an 'archive of urban space' (2014, p.11), it is also a Chinese truism today that urban spaces evermore reveal their own concomitant archiving (and reterritorialisation) of cinematic tropes and affects.

Towards a Theory of Cinematicity

As intimated in the introduction, the contemporary mega cinematic-cities of greater China make for a particularly tantalising scene or setting to explore different notions of cinematicity. For, among other things, a near mythical cinematicity is made palpable by the multimodal ensembles of glass, light and concrete spatial practices and the citizen who populate it, and transform it into a magical screenscape or backdrop for their magical cameras. Yomi Braester certainly makes a comparable claim in his book-length study into the convergences of cinema and urbanity since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. Indeed, Braester notes, Chinese 'films – in

direct interaction with political decisions and architectural blueprints' began to 'forge an urban contract and create the material city and its ideological constructs' (2010, p.13). Specifically, the latter half of Braester's book mounts a consideration of the novel urban realities that began emerging within China around the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and became articulated to, and symptomatic of, the most rapid and unprecedented period of urban growth and development the world has ever witnessed.

The most radical urban changes, Braester notes, were a consequence of abandoning the planned models of a Maoist economy in favour of capitalist globalization, and a concomitant revolution in the culture's existing visual and optical regimes. Braester's observations in turn illuminate how cinema began influencing and in-forming the lived spaces, psychic reality, and urban psychogeography of China's first tier megalopolises: By introducing impressive images of elsewhere that directly impacted the look of the newly emerging glass and light architectural structures, and, as David Leiwei Li elsewhere demonstrates, by offering pedagogical narratives that helped contour the new neoliberal subjectivities needed to populate and operate these new-fangled capitalist spaces (Li, 2016).

Of course, after 2008 China looked to be on the brink of an economic catastrophe, and had to weather a crisis in capitalism. Importantly for us here, though, the building of new cities and urban infrastructure played a foundational role in stabilizing both the Chinese and global economies. To encourage the purchasing of real-estate, for example, the Chinese central bank 'decided to adjust the lower bound of the personal loan interest rate to 0.7 times the benchmark interest rate and revert the down payment portion back to 20%' (Gabrieli, Pilbeam, and Wang 2018). Thus, as David Harvey's analysis of this situation shows, the CCP began supporting an unprecedented system of debt-financing which allowed for increased urban development, the mass employment of labourers, and the pouring nearly 6,651 million tonnes of concrete, designed to help prevent China from economically sinking (Harvey, 2016).

While the most radical urban changes appeared as a consequence of abandoning the planned models of a Maoist economy in favour of capitalist globalization, these developed in tandem with a concomitant revolution in the culture's existing visual and optical regimes *à la* Braester. For, as Braester notes, the new look of the modern

Chinese cities became increasingly moulded and shaped by what were heretofore 'novel observation practices, imaging technologies, and concepts of visualisation,' key amongst which was the cinema (Braester, 2010, p. 1; See also Li 2016). If Braester, like David Leiwei Li, saw the cinema as playing a particularly privileged role in moulding and instructing new 'urban contracts' and subjectivities, and Harvey's observations highlights China's political drive to 'spatially integrate the economy,' we can here interconnect the two positions by enfolding both inside Beller's fractal-form *techno-capital* pattern: wherein co-extensive capitalist and cinematic regimes blur culture and industry, looking and labour to help institute a profitable network of optical and affective collaborations and spatial practices (Beller, 2006, p. 12). Resonances here too of Guy Debord's observation that a society that 'moulds all of its surroundings has developed a special technique for shaping its very territory, the solid ground of this collection of tasks.' And that '[u]rbanism is capitalism's seizure of the natural and human environment; developing logically into absolute domination,' so that capitalism ultimately remakes 'the totality of space into its own setting' (Debord 1983, p. 169). Or again, as Harvey renders it, capitalist forms were literally built into the Chinese landscape, transforming the local cultural environment into little more than 'a series of mnemonics' associated with a new cultural 'identity and social and collective meanings' (Harvey, 2016, pp. 6-7).

Recalling again Le Corbusier's notion of the urban environments as comprising machines for living and acting, we can here add to this picture Elizabeth Grosz's notion of urban spaces co-constituting bodies and subjectivities. Significantly, under a system of contemporary Chinese consumerism, these surface as once 'a mode for the regulation and administration of subjects but also an urban space in turn reinscribed by the particularities of its occupation and use' (Grosz 1999: 386).

If Braester and Li expose how film constitutes another form of contemporary Chinese machine for living, and which provides a discursive scaffolding and framework for newly emerging urban lifestyles and policies, in this outing we hope to trace the reverse line. Or at least we hope to demonstrate how the spiralling return of agential and affective filmmaking principles and practices have become detached and divorced from movies only to become (re)distributed and (re)deployed within the city itself as a means to institute and direct the thoughts, feelings, emotions and actions in

keeping with the new neoliberal subjectivities. To demonstrate how, we explore specific forms of concrete assemblages within the city whose narrativising, ideological, and artistic principles force us to rethink the nature and effects of the cinema as a socio-political practice upon the urban milieu. Cities here, like the cinema, thus become interrogated as *mediums*: with each not only being 'in the middle of and shaped by distinctive histories of colonialism, imperialism and globalisation' (Pratt and San Juan, 2014, p.6), but also, we might add, advances in technics and technologism, which help further highlight how cities as screenscapes and spectacles operate as strategic in-between spaces for the flows of desire and capital (see for example Mumford, 1967, 1970). Arriving here, we need now move to our shanghaied concept of *Shi-nema*.

From Cinema to *Shi*-nema via assemblage theory

Today in Ningbo, the dramas of real life can increasingly be found playing out within a contrived *mise-en-scène* of screen-based attention economies and commercial cinematicity. Certain forms of which, as we will shortly see, (parametrically) conspire to create pressurised action-driven 'narrative' structures—replete with suspense, crisis moments and conflicts (or 'duels')—which appear engineered to inspire probable (re)actions (qua transactions). In beginning to unpack how these event-acts come to pass and operate, we might first consider the cinematic notion of *mise-en-scène*: a term originally borrowed from the world of theatre. As undergraduates are taught, when applied to the critical study of film, *mise-en-scène* is translated into 'staging an action' or 'placing on stage'. Of importance here, *mise-en-scène* is primarily linked to the deliberate arrangement of figures, props, costumes, lighting, colour, and scenery in order to optimally communicate meaning. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson thus describe *mise-en-scène* as cuing our expectations, or being deployed to 'guide our attention, our understanding, and our inferences about what we see' (Bordwell and Thompson, 1990, pp. 146-147). Here, the strategic arrangement of heterogeneous elements and qualities within a frame are seen harbouring psychic agency, in that they collectively provoke movements of thought, affectivity, or association in the viewer.

Daniel Frampton updates these principles to describe how different films 'think', or else encourage viewers to think during the temporal screening encounter (Frampton, 2006, p. 175ff). In this context the *mise-en-scène* reveals transversals with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *agencement* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004a, 2004b): which in its most common English translation into 'assemblage' loses its inbuilt etymological sense of harbouring 'agency.'[iii] Ian Buchanan suggests 'arrangement' is a better translation, then, especially if thought of in terms of a 'working arrangement,' which implies an on-going process rather than a static situation (Buchanan, 2014). Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari assemblages/arrangements are dynamic and distributed admixtures weaving together 'semiotic, material, and social flows simultaneously' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004b, p. 23). In such descriptions we can locate further resonances with cinematic *mise-en-scène,* then, which in turn recall Jane Bennett's description of assemblages as 'living, throbbing confederations' of human and inhuman forces (Bennett, 2010, p. 23ff). Of particular pertinence here is Bennett's reworking of assemblage theory to incorporate the sinologist-philosopher François Jullien's sustained engagement with the Chinese notion of *shi* (势).

Bennett notes that *shi* was originally a Chinese military term used to describe: 'a good general who must be able to read and then ride the *shi* of a configuration of moods, winds, historical trends, and armaments: *shi* names the dynamic force emanating from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than from a particular element within it' (Bennett, 2010, p. 35). Within *The Propensity of Things* Jullien traces how the under theorised concept drifts over thousands of years from early descriptions bound up in the art of war, to account for many other Chinese arts, crafts and practices: including landscape painting, calligraphy, religion, poetry and literature. Within and across these different domains, discourses and disciplines, *shi* exposes and exploits the '*inherent potentiality at work in configuration*' (Jullien, 1995, pp. 14-5). For us, the value of this overlooked concept is that it refers to '*a potential born of disposition*' (emphasis in original) and most often 'consists in organising circumstances in such a way as to derive *profit* from them' (Jullien, 1995, p. 27, emphasis ours).

Although he does not engage with the cinema himself, we here creatively extend Jullien's analysis to account for the 'setting of an action' in film (and indeed cine-cities). After all, could not the descriptions of *shi* as a 'poetic atmosphere' not also be applied to the function and power of *mise-en-scène*? (see Jullien, 1995, p. 130). To such ends, we might momentarily turn to contemplation of 费穆 Fei Mu's (Fey Mou) masterful cinematic techniques, and his building and theorisations of *xuanxiang* (悬想 'suspension-imagination') and *kongqi* (空气 'atmosphere'). Interleaving concepts which, as Fan notes, Fey devised (casually in his writing, but more 'rigorously' through his films) to describe the affective and intellectual properties of cinematic *mise-en-scène* (see Fan, 2015, p. 112). Like *shi*, *xuanxiang* and *kongqi* here gesture towards the efficacy of configurations, deployments, set-ups, and dispositions. Which in and of themselves reveal propensities that unconceal themselves to, and affect the subjects encountering them (Jullien, 1995, pp. 16-17). Of relevance to our project here, Fan links the expressive and affective qualities of this Chinese film-thinking to the writing of Deleuze, noting how Fey's cinematic *mise-en-scène* made tangible the flows of desire, while conflating the actual and the virtual. Reconsider in this light, then, Jullien's description of *shi* effecting to open 'up that which is concrete to that which lies beyond it, and for conveying through what is represented the suggestion of something "beyond"' (Jullien, 1995, p. 84).

Beyond the arts, humanities, and (the art of) warfare, *shi* is also a strategic concept that has been applied to the organisation and operations of Chinese socio-politics. In these realms Jullien maintains that *shi* should be understood as a '*shaping of effect*' or as 'a policy of conditioning affects' for the successful management of power and 'the most common patterns of behaviour' (Jullien, 1995, pp. 37, 69). The notion of *Shi* thus again betrays fecund resonances and overlaps with Deleuze and Guattari's modelling of assemblages, which Buchanan reminds us, were originally devised to map the 'flows of power' (Buchanan, 2014, p. 382). Albeit here, *Shi* offers a general theory of efficacy, and 'stands as a perfect example of how one can manage reality' (1995, p. 25). Or again, from the perspective of those in power, *shi* discloses aggregated potentialities cohering around the structures and flows of power; wherein things can be stage-managed and arranged to desirably or profitably influence outcomes. It is precisely for these reasons that Jullien asserts that historically '[m]anipulation, not persuasion, was the Chinese way' (1995, p. 69).

These of course are prevalent ideas. An illustrate example of which can be drawn from the Chinese management of the internet (or the Chinese intranet which blocks much access to the world wide web with its so-called 'Great Fire Wall'). Indeed, it is common knowledge outside China that there is tight internet surveillance and censorship, however many living outwith of China may be less aware of the practices of the so-called 'fifty cents Army,' of 'fifty cents party,' who constitute a large group of active Internet commentators (numbers are estimated be in the hundreds of thousands, including paid bureaucrats) who are hired or commanded to flood online platforms with positive or pro-party messages, comments and articles in an attempt, as wikipedia currently renders it, 'to manipulate public opinion to the benefit of the Chinese Communist Party' (Wikipedia 2019).

Brian Masumi's discussion of an 'abductive politics' (of the arrangement of affects that appear to abduct us) thus becomes another relevant vector of analysis here, in that there is an obvious proto-politics bound up with the arrangement of affects (Massumi, 2015, p. 18).[iv] Here, affect, or the pre-personal, becomes 'much more important for understanding power, even state power narrowly defined, than concepts like ideology' (2015, p. 32). And because affect operates immanently as 'the virtual co-presence of potentials', we necessarily must strive to pay heed to 'our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves' (2015, pp. 5-6). Recalling Grosz assertion that 'the city must be seen as the most immediate locus for the production and circulation of power' (Grosz 1999: 386), we might in turn approach shi-like arrangements as actual modes that introduce virtual relations, or the '*felt reality of a relation*' into an encounter (see e.g. Jenkins 2016, p. 14). Which is to say, we might recognise certain arrangements as being 'relational structures,' wherein a series of relations (and manners of relating) transactionally enfold subjects and objects, or affects and the 'flip-side of affects' (Jenkins, 2016, pp. 20, 15).

Consider in such light an article captioned 'Thinking Chinese Strategic Spatial Planning with Gilles Deleuze,' where Jean Hillier and Kang Cao move beyond the writing of Jullien to forge connections with the writing of Yu-Ming Liu, who offers manifold other examples of *shi*-like concepts relevant to urban spatial planning in China. These include: *shi qi* (士气) 'organisational morale'; *min qi* (民气) 'public support'; *jing qi* (景气) which 'implies economic vitality'; and *qi shi* (启示) which 'implies mental force or energy, including intentions and emotions' (Liu in Hiller and

Cao, 2013, p. 394). The authors there implore contemporary Chinese urban planners to use these principles in their 'tweaking' of urban assemblages, to help nudge their human traffic, 'to tackle a situation ahead of its actualisation: That is, to "steer it gently" (Jullien, 1995, p. 126) in a desired direction' (Hillier and Cao, 2013, pp. 392, 395).[v] Concepts we might re-define in Guattari's language as the tweaking of 'assemblage synapses' to encourage 'remote-controlling' (2013, p.60; 2010, p. 26).

In the following chapters we articulate these various concepts to the multiple intermeshing 'reals' (or overlapping realities including global economic realities, state realities, provincial realities, corporate realities, urban realities, agent realities, consumer realities, class relaities, familial realities, subjective realities, etc.) impressing upon these postsocialist urban *worldings*, which we here playfully call agential *shi*-nematic configurations: whose deliberate *set-ups*[vi] and arrangements contribute to the generation of virtual fields, channelling the flow of desire, and innervating desired human actions. That is, we uniquely explore how actual concrete arrangements and architectural machines manufacture pregnant atmospheres and exploit the virtual orientation between bodies in order to profit a series of overlapping and impinging ecologies and economies.

Fractal modelling

The next concept we wish to address can be related to our Vertigo effect method, wherein we attempt to connect the large and the small, the individual and the collective, within a Realist system of analysis. A system that must in turn confront the problem of the illusion(s) of this world and deal with the kinetic and ever-changing nature of Chinese socio-political reality. A broad consideration of the so-called three pillars of Chinese thought can here help set us on our way.

To begin we can turn to the 'naturalistic cosmology' and 'organic holism' of Confucian thought which Mary Evan Tucker and John Berthrong usefully articulate to the oldest work of the Chinese classics, the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes.* In engineering this encounter they note how in both the universe is often "viewed as a vast integrated unit, not as discrete mechanistic parts. Nature is seen as unified, interconnected, and interpenetrating, constantly relating microcosm and macrocosm" (1998, n.p). In Taoist thought too we can unearth discussions of the miniature human

body being a model or analogue for the entire world, while Buddhist philosophy famously espouses the "idea that smallness is identical to largeness and that the customary proportions between things are completely illusory. Every microcosm can be as vast as the greatest macrocosm" (Julien 1995, p. 95).

There are of course religious, occult and secular Western equivalents. As if inhabiting the aphoristic Buddhist notion that one might discover an entire universe in a single drop of water, for instance, Walter Benjamin's *pars pro toto* approach to cultural images and products grant startling insight into the 'here-and-now' of their production (1999). Benjamin's influential analysis of the small 'crystals of the total event' in his *Arcades Projects* not only served to reveal the large in the small, or the whole in the part, but also anticipated Baudrillard's method when discussiing America as a 'kinetic' and 'cinematic' hyperreality (Baudrillard 2010, p. 18ff):

> America is a giant hologram, in the sense that information concerning the whole is contained in each of its elements. Take the tiniest little place in the desert, any old street in a Midwestern town, a parking lot, a Californian house, a Burger King or a Studbaker, and you have the whole of the US – South, North, East or West. (Baudrillard 2010, p. 29)

We here recognise that China, like Baudrillard's America, is an object that is 'too immense' to understand in its totality, and therefore is an object 'beyond interpretation.' We see China as a particular form of what Timothy Morton calls a Hyperobject (something massively distributed in time and space) that is beyond comprehension or thought. Of necessity then, a slim volume such of this is required to block out far more than it is capable of focusing upon (we do not consider, for example, the belt and road projects, Chinese engagement in Africa, trade wars with the US, the re-education camps in China's North West, or the various historical breaks and on-going political and territorial disputes with Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, or Japan). Instead, we extract and analyse only one form of pattern, which as already indicated in the introduction, we utilise materialist assemblage theory to describe different scales and levels of analysis.

Nor should our fractal diagram be taken to be taken a static of fixed pattern of analysis. For we place our attention hereafter upon dynamic unfolding processes and kinetic events. Which it to say a kind of kinomatic fractal that takes the transversal models of Fèlix Guattari as a point of inspiration. Indeed, Guattari's schizoanalytic or ecosophy methods loom large here, especially with regard to his modelling the 'three ecological registers' whereby the mental, social and environmental or ecologies are seen as intermeshed and plicated courtesy of a prevailing system of Intergrated World Capitalism (Guattari 2010, p. 19). This is to say, we too pay heed to the fact that '[v]ectors of subjectification do not necessarily pass through the individual, which in reality appears to be something like a "terminal" for processes that involve human groups, socio-economic ensembles, data-processing machines, etc.' (Guattari 2010, p. 25). Linked to this, or dynamic modelling also draws inspiration form what in another context Adam Bryx and Brian Reynolds refer to as a 'fractalactic' method (2012). This being a radical expansion of Guattari's transversal models of subjective territory to include "the interactive flux of heterogenous and polyphonic aspects of subjectivity interwoven through individual and collective practices" (Bryx and Reynolds 2012: 291).

Recalling again our fractal image, DeLanda's tweaking of similar Deleuzo-Guattarian models allows him to explore a "multiscaled social reality" that allows us to grasp new forms of insight (DeLanda 2006, p.39). Such modellings, he maintains, can be broadly defined as the study of "objective processes of assembly," a major benefit of which is its ability to investigate "a wide range of social entities, from persons to nation-states, [which can] be treated as assemblages constructed through very specific historical processes, processes in which language plays and important but not a constitutive role" (2006: 3).[vii] Similar fractalactic Realist methods allow us to hereafter consider individuals as assemblages nested within larger assemblages called cities, which are themselves nested within more expansive assemblages called provinces, which in tirn form part of a larger nation state, which takes its place in a global system of capitalism, and so on, somewhat akin to the graduated concentric boxes within a Chinese box system.

We can find a comparable use of use of scale shifting perspectives in the work of David Leiwei Li in his aptly title *Economy, Emotion and Ethics in Chinese Cinema*,

which argues that once neoliberalism took the place of state ideology in China, it quickly became the ruling ideology, "thus providing basic direction and rationality to state policy, international relations, and the emerging values of the media" (Wang Hui in David Leiwei Li 2016: 64). The products of new neoliberal media in turn, he indicates, began to help restructure and re-educate Chinese audiences, and pedagogically impact the shape of new Chinese subjectivities. For commentators paying attention to avant-garde, underground and independent Chinese films of this period such as Shohini Chaudhuri and Tonglin Lu, a national embrace of globalization in the ideological vacuum of the post-Mao are served to expose a characteristic "split or schizophrenic subjectivity" that apathetically registered "the shocks of endless historic reversals demanded by the 'architects of one new China after another'" (Chaudhuri 2006: 99; see also Tonglin Lu 2006, p. 125). This being a new schizophrenic identity that the title of Lin Xiaoping's book the *Children of Marx and Coca-Cola* (2009) elegantly draws into relief, constituting a subjective space of in-between-ness that Tonglin Lu notes forced a new generation of individuals to face alone new alien forms "of working environment, lifestyle, and value system" within a Chinese "world turned topsy-turvy by the worship of the material god, money" (Tonglin Lu 2006: 125).

To continue thinking of this on multiscalar fractalitc levels, we can briefly return to our example of China's response to the 2008 global crisis as an illustrative case in point, noting how the government's unprecedented geological terraforming and concretisation of the national topology and topography not only served to inexorably changed the ecological system but transverally shape the actions, drives and desires of smaller embedded bodies or actors, including provincial governments, entire social groups (or group subjects), and the individual feelings, dreams and desires of everyday citizens.

A Fractalactic Case Study: Or, 'The House Always Wins'

The global financial crisis of 2007-2008 was triggered by the collapse of the subprime mortgage market in the US. In this same period China was in full urbanisation, modernisation and globalisation mode in the build up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. As discussed earlier, in the wake of the Olympics, and in response to the global crisis

in China began engaging in internal parametric and coefficient tweaking of its social and economic order in order to weather the global financial crisis. We might recall here China began pouring of around 6,651 million tonnes of concrete to help prevent the nation from economically sinking (Harvey, 2016). Indeed, Harvey notes that 'after 2008 at least a quarter of China's GDP was derived from housing construction alone,' and when combined with the development of accompanying infrastructure, meant that 'roughly half of China's GDP and almost all of its growth (which bordered on 10 per cent until recently) were attributable to investment in the built environment' (Harvey, 2016, p. 2).

We might also recall here Bill Gates' claims that shortly thereafter, between 2011 and 2013, China poured more concrete than did the US during the entire span of the 20th century (see McCarthy, 2014, n.p. and Harvey, 2016, p. 1). Tied to this radical environmental transformation were large amounts of financial engineering and economic stimulation packages designed to promote mass consumption within China. It is worth remembering that because China's financial services industry was then (as now) in a relatively bound or 'nascent stage,' and the Chinese bank were instructed to offer very low interest rates on savings, this set the conditions wherein Chinese consumers had few other options for financial investment other than the purchase residential real estate (see e.g. Fincher 2014, p.95; Gabrieli, Pilbeam, and Wang 2018). Leta Hong Fincher specifically articulates this form of social engineering to the work of Pierre Bordieu, noting how his 'interpretation of the housing market as the social construction of demand and supply' has become 'especially true for China' (p. 95). We might also draw in the perspective of Jean Baudrillard here, who similarly notes that: 'Far from the individual expressing [their] needs in the economic system, it is the economic system that induces the individual function and the parallel functionality of objects and needs' (2019, p. 133). Needs here becoming a form of social labor, as such, with both the subject and their subjectivity being 'produced by the economic system like unit cells of its reproduction' (p. 133).

Of course, Baudrillard would be quick to point out how these new forms of reality emerge alongside technologies of the screen, which blur any meaningful distinction between reality and fiction, life and media. Linked to which, Fincher also notes how concomitant with this ecological and economic situation a novel combination of state

and private interest also led to the Chinese state-media manufacturing and promulgating a new neoliberal *myth,* associated with the broader 'Chinese Dream.' This indicated that buying a new home was now a necessity for middle-class identity and any self respecting Chinese starting a family (2014, p.95). Various other observers have similarly exposed how the state sponsored media—including the mythical commercial films we will explore in the following chapters—worked to inform and influence this a new consumer public in order to create new '"neoliberal subjects" that govern themselves in accordance with the priorities of the state" (Greenlah and Winckler in Fincher 2018: 29). We can read this in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms as the implantation of desire, or its circulation within the broader cultural matrix. Here, individual's serving as conduits for flows of desire and money that react to the flows of concrete and urban migration. These flows in turn helping to account for the promotion and normalization of what we might call after Zygmunt Bauman a new form of 'consumer orientation,' which was 'first developed as a by-product, and an outlet, of the industrial pattern of control, [and] has been finally prised from the original stem and transformed into a self-sustained and self-perpetuating pattern of life' (1982, p. 179).

This unfolding heterogeneous situation helps us to grasp the rapidly and radically transforming urban *mise-en-scène* of Capitalism's Second Coming in China, and exposes how different scaled assemblages partake in the tweaking of economic coefficients, and the manipulation of social mechanisms and desires; including through a variety of urban media productions. In this case the manifold forms of stimulation and manipulation resulted in the Chinese property market *bubbling* (see e.g Gabrieli, Pilbeam and Wang 2018) into 'a veritable casino of speculative volatility' (Harvey, 2016, p. 3), with the national house price index rising some 332% from its 2000 level in 2015 (Gabrieli, Pilbeam, and Wang 2018). A process that we will return to in more detail in the coming chapter, which provides a microanalytic case study that forms part of this bigger picture; and led to China now boasting one of the highest home ownership rates in the world—currently hovering around 85%—even if this is skewed to economically benefit married heterosexual Han men more than any other subject group or demographic (Fincher 2014: 93).

Concerning Individuals and their Freedom

Adopting such a Realist fractalatic vantage as just sketched helps us to frame how a nation state with a new consumer economy and neoliberal ideology promotes the production of entrepreneurial consumer cities, full of modern machines for living, that promote the production, and the transactional desires of, consumer subjects. From such a vantage we might to tempted to say something along the lines of *individuals do not collectively produce societies, but rather (certain forms of) societies produce individuals*. Or, the parts do not so much determine the pattern, as the pattern defines and determines the parts (see e.g. Perec in Clarke 2003: 61). And here, notions of individual freedom, autonomy, or sovereignty perhaps begin to loom large. On the topic of which, we might here briefly turn to a position recently articulated by Michel Serres, who asks:

> How many women and men live free? Slaves of a party, of an ideology, if it's a question of politics, of societal conventions, of cosmetic or intellectual fashions, of any pressure group in which clones surround a perverse leader, of voracious appetites disgusting to others, of an organised network in which paths always lead somewhere, would they agree to pay the price of a free life with open relations? Who doesn't instead rush towards a directed existence and directed relations, as though having a passion to carry an emblem, the trace of a classification, a brand of party, car or clothing, all relations of belonging? In its school, each fish orients itself parallel to the others, directed by some social magnetic field. It doesn't invent its relations. (Serres 2018: 62)

Serres ideas of mass directed orientation clearly resonate with Baudrillard's notion of subjects being social before they are individual (2019: 133). And our findings and observations in what follows confirm this up to a point. However, such statement may strike some readers as problematic, precisely because it appears to privilege a systemic (read theoretical) approach over a sovereign individual or subjective one (read empirical or ethnographic) based on individual autonomy or freedom of choice.

And while many of our models are in part indebted to or informed by statistical causality and aggregate patterns derived from collective consumption data, we also take pains to pay heed to the subjective level of the fractalictic picture, and explore certain forms of freedom that are indeed suggested by our empirical data (at least

within certain parameters and perimeters). This blended approach, we hope, serves to begin ironing out some of the tensions perceived between systemic approaches (theory) and individual sovereignty (observation).

Indeed, broad statistical (what we might call posthuman) pictures can obscure much, and so we recognise that our study must also focus upon individual bodies (or the human level), which likewise participate in specific transactional blends and encounters within these broader assemblages. In trying to synthesise these we might again channel the work of Elizabeth Grosz, who describes the body as 'a hinge between the population and the individual,' with its 'distribution, habits, alignments, pleasures, norms, and ideals'; while at the same time 'the ostensive object of governmental regulation' whereby the city becomes a privileged 'mode for the regulation and administration of subjects,' even if 'an urban space in turn [becomes] reinscribed by the particularities of its occupation and use' (Grosz 1999: 386). As we will show in the following chapters, certain forms of shi-nematic assemblages (particularly the asetheiticised machinic actualiations of consumerist logic) constantly sift and sort bodies (or enact symbolic exchanges) in order to extract resources or endow then with new forms of cultural capital. From this vantage it is simultaneously clear that no one individual is absolutely detached or free, and also that postsocialist shi-nema machines can serve as a form of cognitive and physiological orientator; offering transactional affordance spaces that systematically hail citizens in ways that make (collective) consumption a form of imperative or obligation.

Similar views are expressed by the human geographer David B. Clarke who, building on the work of Baudriallrd, notes that in postmodern western cities 'consumption amounts to an institution with codified rules, its *structural* dimension (like that of language) is of a far greater significance than any particular usage of consumer goods in everyday life – as status symbols, signs of subcultural dissent, or personal style (analogous with particular utterances or speech effects)' (2003, p.60). We do not want to suggest by such here that all individuals perfectly adhere to the norms, nor that the Chinese follow norms more than their Western counterparts. No, drawing on the work of Emile Durkheim and William H. Durham to contest what we can here call cultural determinism, DeLanda suggests instead that 'absolute imposition and free individual choice are best taken as idealized poles of a continuum, with most actual behaviour

falling somewhere in between, as a mixture of the two' (2000, p.145). For DeLanda then we must search for different enforcement mechanisms and normalising forces, which can be divided roughly into those that flow vertically and horizontally; albeit both being understood to impact a given individual's sense of social obligation and desired action in different admixtures depending on context and the individual. These range from top down hierarchies (from one-to-many in the case of state to the subject, say, or the community acting upon a child, or even one-to-one via a family structure) and influences from the side (cultural replicators coming through informal social networks, say, or peer to peer groups, and even one-to-many structures via advertising or trendy influencers).

Such systemic modellings recognise that while consumer societies are 'programmatically geared towards "deflecting" the possibility of resistance,' the consumer subjects produced in and by them are also not simply inhuman objects brought to life and made to act as per a ventriloquist's dummy, but rather semi-autonomous subject-object that can and do undertake individual acts (Clarke 2003, p. 68). For Clarke, building on ideas borrowed from de Certeau, while we must concede that no consumer subject is sovereign, they are also 'never simply "passive and guided by established rules"' (67). That is to say, consumer citizens do retain an amount of autonomy when it comes to their lifestyle choices. Ultimately a Pyrrhic victory in Clarke's view, though, as the forms of 'democratic' freedom consumerism offers individuals, or allows people to exercise, in the last analysis constitutes a false choice. For, if freedom of choice becomes 'the definitive feature of the consumer society,' it also paradoxically becomes a strict necessity of sorts, whereby as Giddens has it 'we have no choice but to choose' (in Clarke 2003: 145).

Arriving here, we might again turn to DeLanda's remodelling of assemblage theory to help guide us, which at once rejects the 'atomism of neoclassical economists as well as the holism of structuralist-functionalist sociologists' (2000, p. 19). Against these, such models allow us to preserve:

> "methodological individualism" (appropriate to any bottom-up perspective) but rejects the idea that individuals make decisions solely according to self-interested (maximizing) calculations, and instead models individuals as rule

followers subject to different types of normative and institutional constraints that apply collectively. (DeLanda 2000, p. 19).

Chinese urban cinema and shi-nema constitute key sights/sites of compelled Chinese consumption, hailing those who have become seduced or absorbed by the system, and who can gain the so-called freedom that it offers. Here, individuals constitute a form of 'mirror system' within this broader fractaltic picture, presumably having internalized and begun enacting the (often rewarding) duty-like demands made of them. Clarke again:

> The seduced of society have been granted a kind of freedom, no longer being coerced into compliance with the law, on the implicit understanding that it will be in their own self-interest to play by the rules of the consumer society; that they will, however cynically, accept and internalize the belief that this society is suited to them, and therefore they to it' (Clarke 2003, p. 91)

In its different manifestations, the postsocialist Chinese screenscape is here in equal measure a system of seduction and repression, with repression and seduction formulating 'the double face of the selfsafe structuring principle' (92). Returning to a Baudriallardian perspective, Clarke notes how consumption here 'assumes the force of a moral imperative, albeit that of a "fun morality" (2003, p. 145). Or, in old money psychoanalytic terms, we find articulated to a prevailing systemic obligation to choose something like the tyrannical Lacanian-Žižekian (superego) imperative or injunction to 'Enjoy!' (2007, 2009, p.30). Or again, as Tonglin Lu sees it: 'Unlimited freedom remains a collective fantasy that traps everyone in unrealistic expectations of enjoyment' (Tonglin Lu 2006: 135).

4E Psychogeography

In-between any two given relational levels then we might observe a form of transaction and extraction; the blending or blurring of subject-object registers. At the

level of where a Ningbo citizen interacts with a given shi-nematic assemblage in chapters 2, 4 and 5 say, we find it best to approach this form of transactionism through what we call a 4E psychogeographic method. This being a detournment of Debord's earlier formulation of *psychogeography* as the 'study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (1981, p.5),[viii] which we here expand courtesy of more recent insights offered by so-called '4E approaches'.

Coined by philosopher of mind Shaun Gallagher (according to Rowlands, 2013: 219), the term '4E' collects under it an expanding body of results from contemporary cognitive science that highlight why cognition is not something residing within individual heads and minds but is best viewed instead as an *embodied*, *embedded*, *extended*, and *enacted* activity. Each of these 'E's represents an approach to studying cognition, which rejects computational models of cognition and forces attention to the role in cognition of people's bodily structures and functioning, their environment, and the processes of organism environment action that constitute our experience of moving, thinking and feeling in the world.

The added value of such 4E concerns, we maintain, is that they extend the Debordian psychogeographic model by expanding what me mean by the 'psy' domains (conscious rational thought and emotion and the unconscious, see e.g Guattari 2013, p. 32) to account for an expanded range of feelings, and a simultaneously broadened and decentred picture of the prehodological urban geography – the thought-felt extended consciousness gleaned from neuroscientific studies and philosophy of the mind models. The 4E psychogeographic models we favour throughout thus pertain to our *Realist* orientation towards the material world, and inform our *transactional* understanding of the embodied citizen-subjects whose (cognitive) experience and understanding of the world results from extending, embedding and enacting within an affordance space (Gallagher, 2017), which itself can be distinguished as a specific ecology of media (including space, bodies, objects, sounds, smells, and a host of other affects, and so on). Certainly, it is important to recognise how, as Daniel Reynolds recently frames it in his *Media in Mind,* 'the bulk of the "work" of media use occurs in a realm below or separate from consciousness—cognition or the unconscious— inaccessible to conscious thought' (2019 p.5). That is, while interviews and

discussions with subjects might offer a psychological insight into a given phenomena or feeling, our empirical, relational, and materialist study also pays heed to a range of inhuman actors and objects that assemble with bodies, and serve to influence, guide, direct or nudge action and behaviour in a way that individual subjects may not be aware of, or even perceive (reifying what neurologists describe in terms of a certain of mind blindness, wherein the individual cannot consciously account for their actions and decisions, but perform them naturally and skilfully nonetheless). These 4E encounters are at work whenever a subject-citizen moves into composition with urban media we argue, which work upon each other for differing yet overlapping periods and durations – warranting a return to the idea of *entanglement* in enactive cognitive science as "the presence of deep correlations between processes at multiple timescales in each body" (Di Paulo, Cuffari & De Jaegher 2018, p.77).

To illustrate the model of *embodied* cognition, Malafouris (2013) explains that "bodily features play a significant role in how or what an organism thinks and in how it makes sense of the world" (p.59). The hand, for example, as well as being "an instrument for manipulating an externally given objective world by carrying out the orders issued to it by the brain," must also be recognized as "one of the main perturbatory channels through which the world is perceived and classified" (Malafouris, 2013 , p. 60). While *embedded* cognition broadens the scope of cognitive activity from the body to its material, social, and cultural environment (Wilson & Foglia, 2017), *extended* models of cognition seek to explain how "relevant external features are active, playing a crucial role in the here-and-now" of a cognitive process (Clark & Chalmers, 1998 , p. 9; emphasis in original). Classic examples include the use of touchstones, or in more modern times, the pocket diary as an extrasomatic memory, the blind person's cane as a "feeler," and the external rotation of a Tetris zoid to "reduce inner computational effort" in determining goodness of fit (Clark, 1997 , p. 66, 2011 ; Kirsh, 1995).

An *enactive* view of the relation between cognition, body, and environment offers a different slant to the somewhat functional focus of embodied, extend and distributed perspectives (Gallagher, 2017). Originating in the philosophical tradition of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012), enaction forces attention to how, as

Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) put it, "cognitive structures emerge from the kinds of recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided" (p. 176). The terms "emerge," "enable," and "guide" are key constructs here. Indexing as they do the gradual and bi-directional processes of perceptual adjustment and adaptation required to accomplish cognitive tasks ranging from the everyday (e.g. reaching for an apple, opening a door) to the more complex (e.g., viewing a painting, fielding a baseball). Instead of relying on the build up of symbolic manipulation of inner mental models to accomplish such actions, following enactivist Gallagher (2017), the embodied mind dynamically "responds to the world rather than represents it" (p. 47; emphasis in original). Taking into account the biological, emotional, and affective aspects of our embodied lives becomes relevant here too, as factors such as "hunger, fatigue and pain" are among those found to "modulate body-environment coupling, and become part of the reciprocal causal relations that shape cognitive process" (p. 41).

Such ideas have entailed a broader reframe in much of media studies of late, and in part account for the increasing study of pre-conscious or non-conscious phenomena. Steven Shaviro's recent work *Discognition* (2015) makes for an illustrative case in point why focusing on things external to, or prior to consciousness is important to our Realist drive. Indeed, in one telling passage Shaviro incorporates the work of Thomas Metzinger, noting that:

> Our minds perpetually suffer from "things like inattentional blindness, change blindness, masking, perceptual asynchrony, processing lags, and so on… You could make a career out of cataloguing all the ways in which consciousness is either blinkered or outright deceptive… Out of all the information our brains crunch every second, only a tiny sliver makes it to conscious experience – less than a millionth, by some estimates." The seeming richness of my first-person perspective is a hallucinatory effect of this fundamental sparseness. (Shaviro 2015, p. 111-2)

In writing *Chinese Urban Shi-nema*, we hope to contribute another "tiny sliver" into the conscious experience of readers interested in millennial China today. The

following chapters aim to add further "hallucinatory effect" to our collective (alien and domestic) understanding of Chinese societies, subjectivities and the interactions that we find in its shi-nematic, fractally modelled, 4E psychogeographic spaces.

[i] A similar argument is made by the filmmaker-philosopher Werner Herzog in his 3D film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010), where he situates the emergence of the 'modern mind' some 20,000 years ago alongside proto-cinema-like interactions with proto-archaeological cave paintings in the Chauvet Caves, which were animated and brought to life by our ancestor's wielding of fire.

[ii] The term or concept postsocialism has gained a lot of currency in the new millennium. In discussions of Chinese cinemas Zhang Yingjin maintains that the term is best taken as a Chinese equivalent to Jean-François Lyotard's concept of 'postmodernism,' which is expanded to account for a diverse post-Maoist sociopolitical and artistic landscape that includes a broad range of filmmakers from 'different generations, aesthetic aspirations, and ideological persuasions [that] struggle to readjust or redefine their different strategic positions in different social, political, and economic situations' (Zhang Yingjin 2007: 50–2). Chris Berry on the other hand notes how postsocialism, like postmodernism, should be read in terms of the stubborn persistence of grand myths and narratives long after any real faith in them has been lost (Berry 2007: 116).

[iii] In *The Deleuze Dictionary* Graham Livesey describes assemblages as 'constellations of objects, bodies, expressions, qualities and territories that come together for varying periods of time to ideally create new ways of functioning' (2010, p. 18). A J. Macgregor Wise and John Law also highlight, assemblages are most often associated with notions of 'putting together' ,'arrangement', 'laying out', 'layout', or 'fitting' (Wise, 2011, p. 92), and encompasses abroad range of meanings that include 'to arrange, to dispose, to fit up, to combine, to order' (Law in Buchanan, 2014).

[iv] Masumi notion of an 'abductive politics' is inspired by the work of the philosopher C.S. Peirce who used the word 'abduction' to refer to 'thought that is still couched in bodily feeling, that is still fully bound up with unfolding sensation as it goes into action but before it has been able to articulate itself in conscious reflection and guarded language' (see Masumi 2015, pp. 9-10).

[v] Hiller and Cao also state that 'the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari have sufficient resonances with classical Chinese philosophy to be inspirational for the development of a theory and methodology for strategic spatial planning in a spatially coextensive, fragmented, plural country. This would be a hybrid Deleuzism: 'a palimpsest of nonsynchronous, emergent, and residual formations, a mixture of various space-times, and an overlap of different modes of production' (Lu et al, 2004, p. 13). (Hiller and Cao 2013, p. 392).

[vi] We might recall here that beyond Jullien's description of shi as a deliberate 'setting up' or arrangement of things, in English the idiomatic use of the words set-up variously refers to a form of deception, wherein a victim or dupe plays an unwitting role in a contrived event or practical joke, as well as meaning to erect, assemble, lay plans for, establish, provide capital for, or put in an upright position.

[vii] We remain aware that there are always larger and smaller scale assemblages stretching up and away, or down and below from our chosen territory of analysis. Before and beneath the psychological subject there is of course the biome population of their gut, their cellular arrangement of organs, muscles, and bone, and the genetic substratum. Over and above the nation state there remains a global marketplace of trade, politics, and ecologies of other nation states and trading blocks. To such end our territory of analysis, in both time and space, is necessarily engulfed, and given context by other larger and smaller scales that either encompass them or serve as their platform.

[viii] Debord's larger description goes thus: 'The word *psychogeography*, suggested by an illiterate Kabyle as a general term for the phenomena a few of us were investigating around the summer of 1953, is not too innapropriate. It does not contradict the materialist perspective of the conditioning of life and thought by objective nature. Geography, for example, deals with the determinant action of general forces, such as soil composition or climatic conditions, on the economic structures of society, and thus

on the corresponding conception that such a society can have of the world. *Psychogeography* could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The adjective *psychogeographical,* retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery' (Debord 1981, p.5)