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Bong Joon-ho's *Eternal Engine*

Translation, Memory, and Ecological Collapse
in *Snowpiercer* (2013)

CLAIRE GULLANDER-DROLET

Set in the dystopic near future, in the year 2032, Korean director Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* takes as its starting point an environmental disaster set in the then temporal present 2014. An attempt to chemically counteract the global warming crisis through the use of a substance called CW-7 has failed, resulting in the freezing of the planet and the extinction of almost all life. The few people lucky enough to survive reside on a train commandeered by the prescient American genius Dr. Wilford, who has designed a locomotive capable of circling the planet at the rate of one lap per year. It is, in many ways, a timely film—not only for the ecological and political issues that it addresses but for the global scope of its critique. As a space, the train both encompasses and resists the idea of a coherent nation or national allegiance—though it houses an array of people from disparate countries and backgrounds, it hurtles across the globe unhinged from any territorial expanse.

While critics have been quick to read *Snowpiercer* as a straightforward class drama or work of cli-fi, less attention has been paid to the linguistic dimensions of its dystopian narrative.¹ The film underscores translation as a subtle yet powerful force that shapes how we see—or don't see—environmental violence on a global scale. Through moments of ecological collapse and communication failure, *Snowpiercer* emphasizes the untenability of our current petrocaptalist system and imag-

ines, in its stead, a global future predicated on care for others and the planet rather than economic gain. The viability of this imagined future is crucially dependent on the practice of translation, which aids in the formation of empathic intranational connections, ensuring the survival of the planet. I argue that a reading of *Snowpiercer*'s climate change narrative through the lens of translation reveals two problematic assumptions undergirding current discussions about climate change, environmental destruction, and global culture. The first assumption is an embrace of globalism that is both implicitly financial and articulated in (or through) the anglophone West. This uncritical monolingualism is particularly surprising, given the widespread embrace of the transnational turn by scholars working in the humanities.² The second assumption, which is related to the first, is the notion that the work of translation is somehow an ideologically neutral act. This seemingly obvious concept is nevertheless important to keep in mind when considering how art and literature of the Anthropocene—already working to give expression and shape to a phenomenon that seems to resist representation altogether—is subject to further distortions as it is acted on by translation, moving from one language system and cultural context to another.

My reading of the entanglements of globalism, environmental violence, and translation in Bong's oeuvre is thus twofold. I begin by situating *Snowpiercer*—and Bong's work more generally—within the current cinematic climate of the United States. While a version of global cinema has been embraced by North American critics, I argue that the circulation difficulties *Snowpiercer* faced upon release expose a certain inflexibility around the kinds of international releases allowed to circulate in American theatres, especially when these films grapple with politically exigent issues like climate change. I then move to a more formal reading of *Snowpiercer*'s ecodystopian narrative, which I suggest uses the trope of translation to make strange (and strangely *visible*) the anglocentric and North American underpinnings of our global petrocapiatlist system. I conclude with a consideration of the futures—environmental, political, and linguistic—that the film envisions and with a reflection on what the adaptive afterlives of the film might hold.

Translation as Genre, or The Anglocentric Demands of “Global” Cinema

Though *Snowpiercer* envisions a world in the dystopian future, it bears an uncanny resemblance to our current moment. The hierarchical configuration of its train in particular—with the lowest-class, most-destitute passengers in the tail section—points to the unsettling durability of certain structures, like class, in this postapocalyptic hermetic space. The train is, we are told, “a closed ecological system [in which the total] number of units must be very closely, precisely controlled in order to maintain the proper sustainable balance.” Given the limited resources aboard the train, the ecosystem must be maintained through highly artificial—even violent—manipulation, with the lowest-class section inevitably bearing the brunt of the brutality. In the tail section, people are gunned down periodically in a gruesome approximation of natural selection, forced to eat reconstituted cockroach bars for sustenance (we are told that in the early days of the train, they had to eat each other), and have their children taken from them to labor on the “eternal engine” at the front of the train.

The main plot of the film involves a tail-section uprising led by a man named Curtis (played by Chris Evans) and a security specialist named Nam Goong Minsoo (played by Song Kang-ho), who overtake the train section by section in order to recoup the stolen children. As the tail-section rebels weave through these successive cabins, the full scope of this “delicate ecosystem”—and its reliance on a brutal suppression of the lower-class passengers—comes into view. The trappings of luxury that we see in the upper section—from lush greenhouses to sushi and steak and chambers devoted to eternal parties—are made possible only by depriving the tail-section passengers or else by using them for labor, resources, and even body parts.

Despite the familiarity and appeal of this class-based uprising narrative, and despite being met with acclaim by critics at limited early screenings worldwide, *Snowpiercer* nearly missed American audiences in the summer of 2013. The film, Bong’s first predominantly English-language release, had a budget of \$40 million, making it the most expensive South Korean film yet made.³ Postproduction conflicts between Bong and the Weinstein Company ensued shortly after Harvey Weinstein purchased the distribution rights for *Snowpiercer* in six

English-speaking countries. Concerns were raised about the length of the film and the clarity of its message, with Weinstein fretting that Bong's critique of class politics and global warming might be too densely allegorical for theatregoers in "Iowa and Oklahoma." The Weinstein Company issued a long list of proposed changes to Bong's 119-minute film, including slashing twenty-five minutes of crucial characterization and dialogue and suggesting that Weinstein Sr.'s close personal friend, renowned British science fiction writer Neil Gaiman, pen some contextualizing voice-overs.⁴ These changes, one can only assume, were proffered in the hopes of molding *Snowpiercer* to resemble a more conventional action blockbuster, and Bong took great offense to them, refusing to acquiesce to the Weinstein Company's demands.

It is important to note how this anxiety over the legibility of *Snowpiercer's* message presumes a homogeneity among English-speaking viewership, one that moves from the locally situated to the global. What in fact gets masked by this rhetorical gloss—where a supposed concern for audiences in the rural United States is projected onto English-speaking audiences worldwide—is a larger concern for the film's profitability. Despite growing global interest in Asian cinema, many of Asia's top directors—Wong Kar-Wai, Park Chan-wook, and Bong among them—have had an exceedingly difficult time screening their work internationally, often having to endure excessive cuts to their films under the pretense of making their work more legible to Western audiences (Weinstein, for his part, has earned the nickname Scissorhands due to the almost compulsive cutting he does to the foreign-language films he acquires).⁵ But if this precedent is born out of the assumption that English-speaking audiences are less likely to turn out in droves to view a film with subtitles, what do we make of the fact that Asian directors who produce films in English are often subjected to the same principle? Why should a largely English-language film like *Snowpiercer*, which counts big American stars like Octavia Spencer and Chris Evans (Captain America himself!) among its multinational cast, seem such an odd fit for mass circulation in American theatres?

The answer to this lies partly with the presumed loss of authenticity that attends a film in a language or from a perspective assumed not to be the director's own—a damaging charge, no doubt, and one to which Asian directors and writers are particularly vulnerable.⁶ Weinstein's

suggestion that Neil Gaiman narrate the film—to paper, quite literally, the Western voice over the Korean-composed dialogue—can be read as an anxiety over who gets to speak an authoritative English. Likewise, the move to English-language filmmaking is also frequently read as a kind of betrayal in non-Western countries like Korea, where the United States has long been a meddling military and cultural presence. Many Korean critics saw Bong’s move to Hollywood as signaling the end of Korean national cinema. As one Korean critic glibly put it, while taking a jab at *Snowpiercer* in the process, 2012 was “the year the Chungmoro train left for Hollywood.”⁷

Snowpiercer’s thematic centering on issues of climate change also contributed significantly to its delayed release. Gill Branston has suggested that such delays are typical of the climate change blockbuster—the spectacular nature shots for which the genre is known, for instance, take copious amounts of time and man power to shoot, often tying up the production process.⁸ There is also the matter of ensuring that the film’s narrative can travel—that it has, in Branston’s words, “extreme translatability” for global audiences, a process that can take months or even years to unfold. The case of *Snowpiercer* is especially instructive, then, because the delays in its production persisted *in spite of* its adherence to these aesthetic ideals. The film’s plot is, as I have shown, immediately recognizable within the generic landscape of the Hollywood blockbuster, so there ought not to be a question about its global legibility. Therefore, the struggle over the release of *Snowpiercer* ultimately raises the question of who gets to narrate global climate change and in what language. Indeed, Bong’s film deviates most sharply from more immediately recognizable climate change blockbusters (e.g., *The Day after Tomorrow*, *Geostorm*) in its refusal to cast the United States as the de facto solution to the ecological catastrophes we currently face as a planet.⁹ The strategic multilingualism that *Snowpiercer* employs—and that I attend to in greater detail in the following section—likewise calls attention to the problematic anglocentrism underpinning climate change discourse in both academic and public spheres. While anthropologists and other climate change scholars are beginning, if slowly, to emphasize issues of translation in their work, the impact of big-budget, multilingual blockbusters like *Snowpiercer* in responding to issues of climate change cannot be understated.¹⁰ By intervening in this traditionally US-centric genre and changing the directional flow of these

narratives, Bong's film reframes climate change as a distinctly global issue, one that needs to be articulated in multiple languages.

The release trajectory of *Snowpiercer*—and its widespread success on the video-on-demand (VOD) market—likewise reflects a global appetite for such alternative narratives about climate change. The Weinstein Company's decision to give Bong's final cut of *Snowpiercer* a very limited theatrical release—it initially screened in just eight theaters across the United States—was uniformly panned by film critics and enthusiasts online, with the criticism eventually growing so heated that the company agreed to a VOD release just to avoid the bad publicity. This turned out to be a lucrative decision, with the VOD release quickly outearning the theatrical, despite a three-week head start by the latter.¹¹ Though it would only be partially accurate to say that this was a wholesale victory of *Snowpiercer's* viewing public over the Weinstein Company—the company was, after all, quick to glean the possibility of profit within the VOD release of the film—*Snowpiercer's* viewership reconfigures the networks of power that have traditionally governed film production and reception, by rejecting the North American producer's "translation" of the film in favor of the authoritative original.¹² That *Snowpiercer's* tremendous financial success derived primarily from international screenings is likewise significant, as it frames this network of power as a diffuse international configuration and not the purview of North America alone.¹³ *Snowpiercer's* diverse viewership emblemizes a new network formation, one that decenters the privileged position of the US moviegoer and rejects the idea that North American production companies should "translate" (i.e., structurally manipulate and cut) nonanglophone films for their international audiences. It is with this spirit of a truly global—and multilingual—cinema in mind that I move to situate Bong's oeuvre within South Korea's film scene and read the entwined critiques of climate change and translation at play in *Snowpiercer*.

Snowpiercer's Ecotranslational Critique

As a tenured filmmaker and one of South Korea's most esteemed directors, Bong is no stranger to controversy surrounding his work. Since the release of his breakout hit *Memories of Murder* in 2003, Bong has been something of a polarizing figure in South Korean

film circles. Critics praise the striking aesthetic range of his films—their signature dark expressiveness—but struggle with the imprint of American generic conventions on what are undoubtedly Korean thematics.¹⁴ His more recent work, beginning with 2008's *Tokyo!* (a collaborative film with Leos Carax and Michel Gondry), has gravitated away from the Korean political themes of *Memories of Murder* and *The Host* (2006) that cemented his early success. Bong confirmed this move away from national cinema toward the global (and multilingual) in an interview with David Chen, where he explained his decision to write a predominantly English screenplay for *Snowpiercer*: “It’s about humanity, humans living in a system. It felt very universal, and I wanted to make a sci-fi film,” he said. “It wasn’t about, ‘Let’s try do an English language film.’ Just by the nature of the story, with all these different types of people on the train, it lent itself to casting people from various countries. It would’ve been rather strange if we’d just had Koreans—South Koreans and North Koreans—in this environment. So, it became a 70–80% English language project, with other languages mixed in there as well.”¹⁵ *Snowpiercer* was, from the outset, a decidedly collaborative production across linguistic lines. Bong dictated the screenplay to Kelly Masterson, the screenwriter of the Sidney Lumet film *Before the Devil Knows You’re Dead*, through a translator; and the concept itself was adapted from the French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige*, created by Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette. The film’s very structure, then, is rooted in translation, in the shuffling between multiple languages, genres, and forms.

Brent Edwards’s conception of “déalage” from *The Practice of Diaspora* is instructive in thinking through the way linguistic difference is articulated in *Snowpiercer*. Although Edwards is writing specifically about black diasporic encounters with the francophone world, his work provides a deeply insightful model for thinking through global cinema’s contribution to translation studies and the function of translation within the larger global network of meaning making and racial formation.¹⁶ Building on the work of postcolonial critics, like Stuart Hall, who are interested in the ways diasporic discourses articulate difference, Edwards argues for an attention not only to the linguistic dimensions of these conceptions of difference but to a renewed attention to “the trace or residue . . . of what escapes translation.” Edwards takes “déalage” as the signal term for his theory of translation for precisely

its untranslatable quality—its meaning of restoring a prior unevenness, which has no equivalent in English. In the French, he notes, “*décalage*” is used to express such manifold concepts as “gap, discrepancy, time-lag, interval . . . even sometimes jet lag.”¹⁷

In this sense, *décalage* is a particularly productive term for thinking through the way diasporic difference is articulated in Bong’s film, whose national allegiances can be difficult to situate. Edwards has suggested, in this vein, that *décalage* is proper to the structure of a diasporic racial formation and that its return in the form of *disarticulation*—the points of misunderstanding, bad faith, unhappy translation—must “be considered a necessary haunting.”¹⁸ Read this way, there is a sense in which the titular train of *Snowpiercer*—as a site that at once houses people from diverse and far-flung diasporic backgrounds, seals them in a hermetic enclave, and yet travels the world untethered to any nation or country—must also be such haunted grounds, acted on by the linguistic and historical memories of the people who inhabit it. Accents in *Snowpiercer* are significant, because they remain the one vestige of the passengers’ nationality, the trace or residue—the *décalé*, to use Edwards’s formulation—of a lingering, or haunting, diasporic identity. The film is rife with moments in which non-English languages and accents punctuate the denouement—as, for example, when an Irish passenger says, “Sumimasen,” to a fellow tail-section bunker or when a German porter and a North African man (who is making sushi) exchange a few words in French. These exchanges work to decenter English and call attention to the various ways that power is construed through the insistence on a single language.

The artificial, and often violent, imposition of English as the authoritative language is expressly satirized in one compelling scene in which representatives from the head section—which controls the “sacred engine” of the train—visit the tail section. After measuring the tail-section children (and offering no explanation for doing this), the representatives take two children to the front of the train, causing the children’s parents to spur a revolt. After one of the representatives is injured in the struggle, Wilford’s assistant, Mason—played by a wonderfully over-drawn Tilda Swinton—dictates to the rest of the tail section the rationale behind the punishment that is to be doled out. The man is to hold his bare arm outside an arm-sized hole in the train for exactly seven minutes; it will freeze solid and then be broken off. As she begins to

speak about a logic of “preordained positions,” some aides from the head section begin to translate her words into different languages, only to be quickly cut off again. “No, we don’t have time for all that,” Mason interrupts, “we’ve only got seven minutes!”

It’s a small moment, easily lost in the arresting cinematography and action of the film, but one that registers the ways in which language and the linguistic dimensions of domination are critiqued in the film. There is, in this scene, both too much and too little time. Time is compressed (as signaled by the large clock around the condemned man’s neck), but there is also not enough time to translate the explanation. This scene stages the representational crisis at the heart of Rob Nixon’s important book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, which attempts to reckon with the “long dyings—the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological” that are a direct consequence of environmental damage wrought by global capitalism.¹⁹ Because the people most affected by slow violence are “the global poor,” little attention is paid to the sustained biological devastation wrought by Western capitalist greed worldwide. The arrangement of passengers by class (and not nationality or ethnic or linguistic background) is thus central to the film’s environmental critique. The film questions “the long-term sustainability of a world whose economy is increasingly globalized and yet whose resources are increasingly unshared”—a system made possible, Nixon suggests, through a “literal concretizing of ‘out of sight out of mind.’”²⁰ This scene forces the viewer to take in the processes that make possible this very ecosystem through a speeding up of the slow (i.e., long-term, insidious, attritional) violence inflicted on the global poor, translating it, as it were, and making it visible. The critique of global warming and of global English coalesce here, as both visual and linguistic language fail to render the full scope of the currently unfolding crisis. A global economy, undergirded by implicitly American or Western ideals of hegemonic “progress,” can only appear successful and vibrant if the wage labor and environmental destruction that necessarily accompany it are ignored or left untranslated. In scenes such as these, Bong speeds up time to show the consequences of climate change that are always figured in popular discourse as yet to come or happening elsewhere, while emphasizing the bodies of the global poor as the sites where this attritional violence is most pronounced.

Snowpiercer is thus animated by two translative impulses: a strate-

gic multilingualism that calls attention to the ways power is imposed through an insistence on a singular authoritative language and an environmental narrative that attempts to make legible a currently unfolding catastrophe whose full effects are difficult to glean or comprehend. This second version of translation—what we might properly call a kind of historical translation—is slipperier to grasp but becomes clearer if read through the strategies of the first. If a part of the film's project is to challenge the largely monolingual (anglophone) unfoldings of climate change discourse—a project it bears out through multilingual interruptions and moments of translational refusal—we see a similar logic of disruption at work in the film's account of the history of environmental degradation. At first glance, *Snowpiercer* appears to ascribe to the dominant narrative that locates the acceleration of climate change within the Industrial Revolution, roughly between 1760 and 1840.²¹ The titular train of the film is evocative of the coal and steam engines synonymous with this era, as is, certainly, its rigid organization by class. The origins of the environmental disaster at the center of the film, explained via voice-over during the opening credits, likewise squares with accounts of the Anthropocene Era in which a homogenous *anthropos* (here, “mankind”) is collectively responsible for the destruction of the planet.²² But *Snowpiercer's* depiction of climate change history is not as simple as it might initially appear. Throughout the film, these master narratives are frequently disrupted by historical specters that expose the complex relations of power, domination, and control that led to the environmental catastrophe at hand—relations that often resist viewing altogether.

Consider, for instance, the recursive element to *Snowpiercer's* version of world history. If the locomotive of modernity was organized by a racist and classist system we now recognize as being “of another time,” Bong suggests that this kind of disciplinary arrangement of bodies has simply found new expression in the category of the global poor. As a social body, the global poor, like the process of slow violence itself, poses representational difficulties. The film attempts, on some level, to register this global aspect sartorially, with costume designer Catherine George drawing inspiration from “African child soldiers” and “Indian street beggars,” for the tail-section passengers' clothing; but the effect is largely disjunctive, particularly given that Curtis (Chris Evans) and Tanya (Octavia Spencer) are the tail-section passengers with the most screen time.²³ There is, in other words, an inescapably American speci-

ficity to Evans's and Spencer's on-screen presence, one that evokes—or arguably, traffics in—some of US cinema's favored tropes of whiteness and blackness, with the former framed as masculinist and heroic and the latter as feminized, tragic, and buffoonish. In one disturbing scene, Octavia Spencer's character screams, "Chicken! I want chicken!" during a third-class uprising, reentrenching one of the ugliest stereotypes born out of America's long history of antiblack racism. Another reference to this history comes in the form of Alex Haley's seminal work, *Roots*, the only title barely perceptible in Dr. Wilford's library at the end of the film. What to do with these references in a project that seems to insist—at every turn—on an account of climate change in which the United States is decentered both linguistically and territorially?

On the one hand, these disruptive and unsettling gestures force us to acknowledge the living legacies of a system in which the lines between human, animal, and nature were contentiously drawn (and redrawn). Many theories of the Anthropocene, in turning on such taken-for-granted categories as "nature" and "the human," actively disavow this history; the move to situate the origins of climate change within the Industrial Revolution—the fault of a generalized mankind—performs a similar erasure. In order to avoid such violent elisions, then, there needs to be a conceptual and temporal reframing around the very concept of ecological collapse itself. Jason W. Moore suggests that such a critical (re)orientation must begin by addressing the legacies of slavery, settler colonialism, and exploitation and extraction under capitalism:

To locate modernity's origins through the steam engine and coal pit is to prioritize the shutting down of steam engines and coal pits. (And their 21st century incarnations.) To locate the origins of the modern world with the rise of capitalism after 1450, with its audacious strategies of global conquest, cultural commodification, and relentless rationalization, is to prioritize a different politics—one that pursues the fundamental transformation of the relations of power, knowledge, and capital that have made the modern world. Shut down a coal plant, and you can slow global warming for a day; shut down the relations that made the coal plant, and you can stop it for good.²⁴

Read this way, *Snowpiercer's* references to the legacies of slavery take on new resonance. These gestures, which unsettle the otherwise gener-

ic climate change narrative of the film, point to the inadequacy of Anthropocene theory that does not address (and reckon with) these long hauntings. The film also demands that we read these instances beyond an American-historical frame, as part of a much longer trajectory of global capitalist development that relied universally on free labor, enslavement, and antiblack ideology to carry out its extractive policies. In the same way that *Snowpiercer* deploys multilingualism and moments of translational rupture to challenge the problematic anglocentrism of climate change discourse, then, it conjures these histories to emphasize the impossibility of a future that does not reckon meaningfully with the injustices of the past.

Translational Futures

Although *Snowpiercer* is, at its core, a deeply ambivalent film, we get glimpses of what such a reckoning might look like in its final scenes. It concludes with an explosion that destroys the train and leaves but two survivors: Yona (played by Go Ah-sung), a seventeen-year-old train baby of Korean descent, and Timmy (played by Marcanthonee Reis), a seven-year-old train baby of African American descent. Because these two individuals were born on the train, they have no reference point for the “natural” or for the history that preceded Wilford’s experiment. Their presence in the posttrain world, then, allows Bong to weigh whether or not one can—per Moore’s idiom—do away with “the relations that made the coal plant” or if these relations will simply reproduce themselves under new circumstances.

Snowpiercer’s final scene plays on this fundamental ambiguity. Atmospherically, its final frames—marked by an overwhelming, almost oppressive, whiteness—are discordant with the dark and oppressive atmosphere of the rest of the film. As these two unlikely survivors emerge onto a snowy tabula rasa, wearing fur coats stolen from passengers in the train’s drug den, a polar bear emerges in the distance. While the presence of this creature is initially marked as optimistic—its emergence on the scene is accompanied by a groundswell of triumphant classical music—this sense of hope is quickly replaced by a mounting fear. Bong heightens this affect through a series of quick crosscuts between Yona’s face and that of their arctic friend, as though to say, “One of us will become food for the other.” But what is so poignant about

this ending—and what enables it to move beyond the suggestion that history’s exploitative relations of power will simply repeat themselves here—are its three final players. The presence of a black male, an Asian female, and a nonhuman animal at the end of this dystopian narrative gestures toward an alternative future—one that has arguably never before been staged in a Hollywood blockbuster or gleaned in the pages of a mainstream history book.

Indeed, this final scene seems integral to the question of *Snowpiercer*’s screenability, for the image of these two nonwhite survivors, emerging from the wreckage of empire, seems to put too baldly a truth about the untenable forms of environmental, economic, and social slow violence waged by America against the global poor. Since the film’s worldwide release in 2014, two related projects have been released or are in the works. The first, a television spin-off produced by Marty Adelstein’s Tomorrow Studios, has had a particularly protracted journey to production; it is now due to debut on TNT in 2020.²⁵ The other, a filmic companion piece of sorts directed by Bong himself and titled *Okja*, was released in the summer of 2017. Shot in South Korea, Canada, and the United States, and featuring a bilingual (Korean and English) script, *Okja* sustains the critique of global capitalism and translation taken up explicitly in *Snowpiercer*.²⁶ As for the television show, one has to wonder whether it will pick up where *Snowpiercer* leaves off or if the exploding of empire—so spectacularly conceived in the final scenes of Bong’s film—will be quietly and conveniently rewritten, glossed over through the processes of translation, in service to a narrative more favorable to American history. If the release trajectory of *Snowpiercer* is any indication, a global audience, hungry for the alternative, awaits.

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NOTES

1. In his review of *Snowpiercer* for the *New Yorker*, for example, David Denby says that the film “presents a portrait of oligarchical rule and underclass discontent . . . fuelled by

disgust for the decadent rich and admiration for the outraged poor” and likens it to recent postapocalyptic blockbusters like *The Hunger Games* and *Elysium*. These kinds of associations, common to North American reviews of *Snowpiercer*, are problematic, because they suggest that the film’s success is due to its modeling on a kind of uniquely American dystopian formula and flatten the narrative ingenuity and multilingual specificity that make it so special. Perhaps more tellingly, Denby later likens Wilford to Dr. Fu Manchu, the controversial orientalist villain of Sax Rohmer’s Yellow Peril pulp series, without a shred of irony or further qualification. David Denby, “Endgames,” *New Yorker*, June 30, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/07/07/endgames>. See also Bong Joon-ho, *Snowpiercer / 설국열차* (Seoul: CJ Entertainment / RADiUS-TWC, 2013).

2. Eric Hayot writes of this: “Transnationalism’s turn in literary studies has the odd distinction of having largely been theorized before having been practiced. This prematurity has been characteristic not only of Asian American studies but of American and British literary criticism, where, despite the injunctions of postcolonial theory and its successors, the prestige of English and its transnational power have insulated traditional fields against the need (or responsibility) to learn other places and languages” (908–9). Eric Hayot, “The Asian Turns,” *PMLA* 124, no. 3 (2009): 906–17.

3. Tony Rayns, “Blockage on the Line,” *Sight and Sound* 24, no. 1 (2014): 38–40.

4. Rayns, “Blockage on the Line,” 39.

5. Rayns, “Blockage on the Line,” 39. Though this traffic in film editing at the level of script is largely unidirectional, it bears mentioning that North American films screened in Asia (and South Korea in particular) have at times been subjected to censorship and boycott, particularly in the post-IMF climate, when many NGOs signed on to the “boycott Hollywood film” campaign designed to buttress Korea’s national film industry. For more on this, see HyeRyoung Ok, “The Politics of the Korean Blockbuster: Narrating the Nation and the Spectacle of ‘Glocalisation’ in 2009 *Lost Memories*,” *Spectator* 29, no. 2 (2009): 37–46.

6. Stephen Hong Sohn’s *Racial Asymmetries: Asian American Fictional Worlds* (New York: New York University Press, 2014) explores this dynamic in the Asian American literary tradition—namely, the expectations around “Asian” thematics that get projected onto fiction by Asian American authors and the question of whether or not a writer of mixed Asian or non-Asian origins can produce a work of Asian American literature.

7. Baek Eun-ha, “도전! 헐리우드 . . . 박찬욱, 김지운, 봉준호 3인의 감독 3색 베일을 벗다,” *Kyunghang Ilbo*, March 22, 2012, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201203212149475; translation my own, from the Korean. Baek’s article explores Bong’s departure for Hollywood on the heels of two other major Korean directors, Kim Ji-un (*Last Stand*, 2013) and Park Chan-ook (*Stoker*, 2013). Chungmoro train station is located on two major subway lines in Seoul and is recognized as an important site for cinema in the city, hosting the Chungmoro International Musical Film Festival (formerly the Chungmoro International Film Festival).

8. Gill Branston, “The Planet at the End of the World,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 5, no. 2 (2007): 211–29, 219.

9. See Branston, “Planet at the End of the World,” for an extended discussion of this in relation to *The Day after Tomorrow*.

10. Anthropologist Peter Rudiak-Gould’s work on how translation issues have shaped

discussions about climate change in the Marshall Islands is an example of the kind of intervention I'm thinking of here. See Peter Rudiak-Gould, "Promiscuous Corroboration and Climate Change Translation: A Case Study from the Marshall Islands," *Global Environmental Change* 22, no. 1 (2012): 46–54.

11. Brian Brooks, "'Snowpiercer' VOD More Than Doubles US Gross to Nearly \$11 Million," *Deadline*, September 7, 2014, <http://deadline.com/2014/09/snowpiercer-vod-box-office-radius-twc-bong-joon-ho-83084/>.

12. Dorothy Pomerantz, "What the Economics of 'Snowpiercer' Say about the Future of Film," *Forbes*, September 8, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/dorothypomerantz/2014/09/08/what-the-economics-of-snowpiercer-say-about-the-future-of-film/#595179a76ed2>. Pomerantz suggests that the VOD release was actually part of the marketing strategy for the film all along, but this account does not square with the very public conflict between Bong and the Weinsteins that played out online prior to the film's release. Early film critics like Rayns were likewise under the impression that the film might not ever be screened internationally.

13. Pomerantz, "What the Economics of 'Snowpiercer' Say about the Future of Film." Pomerantz describes *Snowpiercer's* North American VOD and box office yields of \$4.4 million and \$6.5 million, respectively, as "not huge numbers," emphasizing that the film made the majority of its \$98 million gross through the international box office.

14. For more on the generic ambivalence of Bong's earlier work and its import to transnational American studies, see Christina Klein's important essay "Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, or Transnational Genres in the Films of Bong Joon-ho," *American Quarterly* 60, vol. 4 (2008): 871–98.

15. David Chen, "Bong Joon-ho Talks about Using Violence, Writing an English Script, and Getting Final Cut for 'Snowpiercer,'" *Slashfilm*, June 27, 2014, <http://www.slashfilm.com/bong-joon-ho-snowpiercer-interview/>.

16. Film theorists (including Dudley Andrew) have sometimes used *décalage* in their readings of global cinema but tend to focus on the temporal aspect of the term—the asynchronicity that inheres in the production of a film, for instance, and the delays in its production, reception, and circulation that constitute a kind of jet lag. I prefer Edwards's understanding of *décalage*, because it preserves this temporal meaning while emphasizing the untranslatable quality of the term, highlighting the centrality of translation to any project with a global readership or viewership.

17. Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13

18. Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*, 14

19. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.

20. Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 20.

21. Paul Crutzen, progenitor of the term "Anthropocene," subscribes to this time line. See Paul Crutzen, "The Geology of Mankind: The Anthropocene," *Nature* 415, vol. 3 (2002): 23.

22. Jason W. Moore has criticized Anthropocene theorists for this generalizing tendency. He writes, "The Anthropocene makes for an easy story. Easy, because it does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity's strategic rela-

tions of power and production. It is an easy story to tell because it does not ask us to think about these relations *at all*.” Jason W. Moore, “The Rise of Cheap Nature,” in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2016), 78–116, 82.

23. Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, “Interview: ‘Snowpiercer’ Costume Designer Catherine George,” *Hellotailor* (blog), July 29, 2014, <http://hellotailor.blogspot.kr/2014/07/interview-with-snowpiercer-costume.html>.

24. Moore, “Rise of Cheap Nature,” 94.

25. For an account of the *Snowpiercer* television show’s production woes since 2016, see Beth Elderkin, “Everything We Know about *Snowpiercer*, the Troubled TV Show That Just Can’t Be Stopped,” *Gizmodo*, May 25, 2019, <https://io9.gizmodo.com/everything-we-know-about-snowpiercer-the-troubled-tv-s-1834781507>.

26. Denise Petski of *Deadline* describes the plot of *Okja* as follows: “*Okja* follows Mija, a young girl who must risk everything to prevent a powerful, multi-national company from kidnapping her best friend—a massive animal named *Okja*. Mija will be played by Seohyun An.” Denise Petski, “‘Okja’: Walking Dead’s Steven Yeun, Lily Collins, and More Round Out Cast of ‘Snowpiercer’ Follow,” *Deadline*, April 22, 2016, <http://deadline.com/2016/04/okja-steven-yeun-lily-collins-cast-snowpiercer-follow-bongjoon-ho-1201742154/>