

Conscientious abjection and chaosmopolitanism in Khavn de la Cruz's *Ruined Heart*

William Brown, University of Roehampton, London

Abstract

This essay argues that Khavn de la Cruz's *Ruined Heart: Another Love Story Between A Criminal and A Whore* (Philippines/Germany, 2014) provides us with an example of both conscientious abjection and chaosmopolitanism. The film is an example of conscientious abjection both in terms of content and in terms of form, since it willfully presents to viewers not only a glimpse of the slums of Manila, but also in such a way that the viewer is denied easy access to the sense or meaning of such spaces via Khavn and cinematographer Christopher Doyle's deliberate use of chaotic images and a rejection of narrative. That is, not only is the film's plot hard to follow, but its images also defy easy interpretation. Featuring established world cinema icon Tadanobu Asano and shot by star cinematographer Doyle, one might argue that *Ruined Heart* nonetheless is a cosmopolitan film as it travels the global festival circuit – as well as being an example of abject cosmopolitanism as it lays bare the exclusions that cosmopolitanism typically involves. However, given the film's 'chaotic' nature, I propose that *Ruined Heart* is better an example of 'chaosmopolitan' cinema, as it demonstrates not just a cosmopolitan openness to other spaces, but also a chaosmopolitan openness to other times.

Keywords: conscientious abjection, chaosmopolitanism, Khavn de la Cruz, necropolitics, *Ruined Heart*

Author biography: William Brown is a Senior Lecturer in Film at the University of Roehampton, London, and a Visiting Associate Professor in Film at New York University Abu Dhabi. He is the author of *Non-Cinema: Global Digital Filmmaking and the Multitude* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age* (Berghahn, 2013). He has also made various micro-budget feature films spanning fiction, documentary and the essay-film.

In this essay, I shall use the concepts of abjection and cosmopolitanism to analyse Khavn de la Cruz's *Ruined Heart: Another Love Story Between A Criminal and A Whore* (Philippines/Germany, 2014), arguing that the film critiques contemporary neoliberalism, as well as the central role that cinema plays in its globalisation. More than this, I shall show how Khavn's film also helps us to question and to refine our understanding of abjection and cosmopolitanism, in particular as these concepts have been used in combination – with political theorists using 'abject cosmopolitanism' as a framework to think about the role and condition of migrants and migration in the contemporary world (Nyers 2003). For, as we shall see, Khavn's film, or what the director himself would call a non-film, conscientiously embraces abjection both in terms of content and in terms of form, meaning that *Ruined Heart* constitutes a cinematic form of 'conscientious abjection.' Khavn's conscientious abjection is not carried out simply to offend, but also to reflect the abject/excluded nature of (much of) the Philippines in the contemporary neoliberal world. Furthermore, if Khavn is something of an abjectly cosmopolitan filmmaker whose chaotic punk aesthetic challenges much of the more 'properly' cosmopolitan filmmaking that traverses the world on the festival circuit, then perhaps he is not so much cosmopolitan as

‘chaosmopolitan.’ Drawing upon recent cosmopolitan theory, especially as it has been applied to film (see Rovisco 2013; Deleyto 2016), we shall also see how *Ruined Heart* is not uniquely about the establishment and crossing of spatial borders (which is the remit of cosmopolitanism), but that it is also about openness to different temporalities and rhythms (which I shall propose is key to chaosmopolitanism). That is, Khavn’s film formally adopts digital technology in order to challenge cinema’s own openness to other places and times, hence the director’s claim that *Ruined Heart* is, like his other movies, paradoxically ‘not a film.’ In this way, I shall demonstrate how the novel concepts of conscientious abjection and chaosmopolitanism can help us to understand *Ruined Heart* both as a reflection of contemporary life in the Philippines and as a reflection of the political role that cinema plays in the contemporary world. Finally, I shall also demonstrate how *Ruined Heart* itself offers a devastating portrayal of the effects of historical colonialism and contemporary neoliberalism. First, though, let us introduce Khavn de la Cruz and the context in which he works.

This is not a film

Since the early 2000s, Khavn de la Cruz has been prolific in making movies in his native Philippines, regularly working with digital technology, non-professional actors and low-budgets, creating work that straddles fiction, documentary, experimental cinema and the essay-film. He has received nominations and awards at festivals as diverse as the Berlin International Film Festival, the Rotterdam International Film Festival, the Tokyo International Film Festival, CPH:DOX, the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival and the Cinemania International Film Festival. Perhaps best known among his films are the documentary *Iskwaterpangk/Squatterpunk* (Philippines, 2007) and the fiction film *Mondomanila: Kung paano ko inayos ang buhok ko matapos ang mahaba-haba ring paglalakbay/Mondomanila: Or How I Fixed My Hair After a Rather Long Journey* (Philippines/Germany, 2010).

As might be hinted by the improbably long title of the latter film, Khavn deliberately challenges the norms and expectations of conventional cinema, regularly creating films with little to no dialogue and which feature prominent punk soundtracks, often written and composed by Khavn himself (and sometimes performed by the Brockas, a band named after Lino Brocka and which features Khavn and fellow Philippine filmmaker Lav Diaz). Khavn works quickly – the Internet Movie Database lists 26 features and 19 shorts since 2004, although there are various films not listed on the site that he has directed – and he also works specifically with digital technology to create his films. Indeed, in various of his writings and manifestos, Khavn evangelizes about being ‘filmless’ and about how digital film is significantly cheaper than celluloid film (see Baumgärtel 2012: 119-124). It is for this reason that Khavn called one of his production companies Filmless Films, while also announcing before the majority of his works that ‘this is not a film by Khavn de la Cruz.’

However, while Khavn adopts a ‘punk’ aesthetic that regularly features shocking imagery and stories (*Squatterpunk* is about street urchins in Manila while *Mondomanila* follows a gang in its struggles against an American paedophile), his aim is not simply to shock. Rather, there is a political component to Khavn’s films that is indeed linked to their digital nature. In his own words: ‘[d]igital film, with its qualities of mobility, flexibility, intimacy, and accessibility, is the apt medium for a Third World Country like the Philippines’ (see Baumgärtel 2012: 123). By situating his own practice within a geopolitical context (‘Third World Country’), Khavn clearly

links digital filmmaking with histories of colonialism and imperialism that have divided the world into at least two (First and Third) parts. What is more, Khavn's paradoxical claim not to be making films also links to this political dimension of his work. For, Khavn's unconventional approach to film – working at speed, adopting a rough-and-ready digital aesthetic characterised regularly by rapid editing and handheld camera work – ties in with his repeated aim to represent that which is not typically represented in mainstream cinema, be that from Hollywood, the Philippines itself, or elsewhere. That is, working often with non-professionals who live in the slums of Metro Manila, Khavn shows the poor and the overlooked of Philippine society, defiantly cocking a snook at the fantasies of the mainstream, *bourgeois* cinema and the niceties of its easy-to-follow aesthetic.

In this way, the content of Khavn's films is matched by a politicised and digital form that does not just engage with showing us a different reality (Manila's slums), but which also does work to address the way in which cinema itself plays a key role in shaping our perceptions of reality, with that which is 'fit' for cinema being considered more real than that which typically does not feature in film. As a result, Khavn deliberately creates a form of what I have elsewhere called 'non-cinema' (see Brown 2016; 2018) as part of the struggle against *bourgeois* society and what Jonathan Beller might define as its cinematic values and mode of production (Beller 2006). Perhaps it is small wonder that Beller, too, has been attracted to Khavn's work and written extensively about him, suggesting that *Squatterpunk* constitutes a defiant 'aesthetics of survival' in the face of the image-driven 'advertisarial' logic of contemporary global capital, or what I shall here term neoliberalism (Beller 2013: 47-49).

Ruined Heart

In some respects *Ruined Heart* signals a departure for Khavn, since it is his first film to feature internationally recognised stars, most notably Tadanobu Asano, a Japanese actor who has worked with various international *auteurs* like Nagisa Ôshima (*Gohatto*, Japan/France/UK, 1999), Takashi Miike (*Koroshiya I/Ichi the Killer*, Japan, 2001), Hou Hsiao-hsien (*Kôh jikô/Café Lumière*, Japan/Taiwan, 2003), Takeshi Kitano (*Zatoichi*, Japan, 2003) and Pen-Ek Ratanaruang (*Ruang rak noi nid mahasan/Last Life in the Universe*, Thailand/Japan/Netherlands, 2003, and *Invisible Waves*, Thailand/Netherlands, 2006), while recently also appearing in various Hollywood films, including several iterations of the Disney and Marvel *Thor* franchise (*Thor*, Kenneth Branagh, USA, 2011; *Thor: The Dark World*, Alan Taylor, USA, 2013; *Thor: Ragnarök*, Taika Waititi, USA, 2017). Asano plays the titular Criminal, while the Whore is played by Nathalia Acevedo, who also starred in Carlos Reygadas' *Post Tenebras Lux* (Mexico/France/Netherlands/Germany, 2012), with German-Russian actress Elena Kazan, who has acted in various Bengali and Hindi/Bollywood films, playing the Lover, a woman that the Criminal seems to leave in order to be with the Whore. The other main characters in the film are the Friend (Andre Fuertellano), the Godfather (Vim Nadera) and the Pianist (played by Khavn himself).

Perhaps more significant than the presence of known actors, though, is the fact that *Ruined Heart* was shot by superstar cinematographer Christopher Doyle, who rose to fame through his work with Wong Kar-Wai (most notably *Chung Hing sam lam/Chungking Express*, Hong Kong, 1994, and *Faa yeung nin wa/In the Mood for Love*, Hong Kong/China, 2000), but who has also worked with such luminaries as Edward Yang (*Hai tan de yi tian/That Day on the Beach*, Taiwan, 1983), Chen Kaige

(*Feng yue/Temptress Moon*, China/Hong Kong, 1996), Gus Van Sant (*Psycho*, USA, 1998; *Paranoid Park*, France/USA, 2007), Phillip Noyce (*Rabbit-Proof Fence*, Australia, 2002), Zhang Yimou (*Ying xiong/Hero*, China/Hong Kong, 2002), Pen-Ek Ratanaruang (*Last Life in the Universe; Invisible Waves*), M. Night Shyamalan (*Lady in the Water*, USA, 2006), Jim Jarmusch (*The Limits of Control*, USA/Japan, 2009), Mark Cousins (*I Am Belfast*, UK, 2015; *Stockholm My Love*, Sweden/UK, 2016) and Alejandro Jodorowsky (*Poesía sin fin/Endless Poetry*, Chile/UK/France, 2016). In this way, *Ruined Heart* constitutes a significantly higher profile film than Khavn's earlier (and subsequent) work.

While for this project Khavn worked with significantly higher profile collaborators than usual, though, in many respects *Ruined Heart* constitutes a typical Khavn film. It features barely any dialogue, instead progressing via a series of musical numbers, some of which we see being performed in the *mise-en-scène*, and some of which are seemingly non-diegetic. The film's story is told in a fragmented fashion, meaning that sometimes it is hard to follow, and with moments of experimental, handheld camera work, hallucinatory sequences set in parades and sex clubs, possible dream sequences, numerous street children and other amateur performers, and a climactic chase and shoot-out in a necropolis (filmed in Manila's North Cemetery).

The film opens with a montage of newspaper pages each featuring stories of violence against women, murder and so on. Then we see a shop front at night, past which a man walks from left to right before there is an off screen explosion. The film then switches to black and white as we see rapidly edited still images during the opening credits, which show the names of the film's personnel tattooed on to the body of a man who lies face down in a gutter as traffic passes by. In colour again, we then hear Lee Soledad's 'Pusong Wasak' ('Ruined Heart') as each of the six main characters (the Criminal, the Lover, the Whore, the Friend, the Godfather and the Pianist) take a turn approaching a veil on to which are sewn butterflies, and through which they look directly at the camera. Already it is unclear quite how these sequences fit together, before we then see the Criminal, his arm in a cast, walk through a slum area in Manila, enter a building and kill a man by stabbing him in the neck with a screwdriver. The Whore flees the scene, and then we see the Whore and the Criminal wander the alleyways of the slum until she bumps her head against a low pipe and starts to bleed. The Pianist then recites a poem in a gymnasium-type space that is inhabited by various (homeless?) children, before he introduces the Godfather at a concert that appears to be part of the latter's political campaign, since there are posters featuring his face in various places. The Criminal arrives on a moped, seemingly now without a cast, before we then see the Criminal in an apartment with a rabbit and a piglet painting a watercolour of a rabbit on a pig that bears a human eye across its torso, with both on a prostrate human. The Criminal walks down an alleyway with the Lover, only to change direction to join the Whore, with whom he approaches a blue VW Beetle. There follows GoPro footage taken by the Criminal of himself and the Whore in the car, before the film cuts to a rainy scene at night where the Criminal lies beaten on the bonnet of a truck as various men fight using martial arts in a kind of truck depot.

What seems to be the basic premise of the plot is that eventually the Godfather abuses the Whore (burning her face with an iron, even though she shows no scars in subsequent scenes), and so the Criminal tries to take her away – only for the Godfather and the Friend to give chase and to kill the Lover, the Whore and the Criminal himself. The film ends with the Criminal wearing a horse's head and the

Whore dressed in white with large black bat-wings walking along an alleyway featuring a mural that announces the importance of family, sportsmanship, God and education in helping young Filipinos to grow up and to achieve their dreams. This sequence echoes an earlier moment when the two wore the same costumes while walking at night around a square with a Ferris wheel at its centre, a location to which we return later to see the Whore (now wearing her most regular costume, a leggings-and-boob-tube combo that resembles the American flag) playing there with some children. Over the end credits, the film shows a man in a horse's head wandering the alleyways of Manila's slums, now visibly bearing the tattoos that we saw on the body of the man during the opening credits – suggesting both that this is the Criminal and that the film's opening credits show us the inevitability of his death.

I offer this relatively detailed description of the film's opening and closing sequences in order to convey to the reader the unusual and experimental nature of Khavn's film, complete as it is with different shooting styles (still images, GoPro selfies, 'regular' shots filmed using a tripod) and scenes the relations between which are not entirely clear and which may be non-chronological. Mainly bereft of dialogue, the film instead asks viewers to look closely at the imagery, even though the meaning of the symbols given (from animals to vehicles, as well as the prominence of the colour blue) is not entirely clear. Without a clear plot, the film functions more on an 'affective' level, inspiring in the viewer a range of feelings as much as it inspires cognitive labour as we try to work out what is actually happening.

As we shall see, the dislocation and alienation that we feel during the film (we do not know exactly what is happening) would seem to be a deliberate strategy on Khavn's behalf – as is the subversion of the regular film plot that we see through the film's use of archetypal characters (Criminal, Whore, etc), who in turn lack psychological depth, and thus are exposed as clichés, as also suggested by the film's arch subtitle (*Another Love Story Between A Criminal and A Whore*). This again works to suggest a distance between this film and regular or generic/genre cinema: if the gangster and musical genres are cinema, then Khavn's anti-aesthetic and incoherent narrative would suggest that this is not a film. This is perhaps equally made clear by another of the film's intertextual references, a brief analysis of which will allow us to engage with the concept of abjection in relation to Khavn's movie.

At one point in *Ruined Heart*, we see the Whore with a client. The sequence opens with the client cracking open an egg to reveal a chicken embryo. Known as *balut*, the eating of fertilized eggs is common practice in the Philippines and elsewhere in southeast Asia, as also documented in *Life in a Day* (Kevin Macdonald, UK/USA, 2011), where a Philippine man eats a *balut* on camera. However, instead of simply eating the *balut*, here the client places it in his mouth before then transferring it to the Whore's mouth, before she in turn gives it back to the client's mouth. The scene is clearly an allusion to *Tampopo* (Juzo Itami, Japan, 1985), where a gangster (Kōji Yakusho) and his mistress (Fukumi Kuroda) erotically exchange an egg yolk between their mouths before the yolk bursts in hers and sends yolk running down her chin. However, where in *Tampopo* the scene is designed to be erotic, in *Ruined Heart*, the exchange is significantly harder to watch – at least in part because of the fertilized nature of the egg/embryo. That is, Khavn deliberately takes something erotic and turns it into something disgusting/difficult to watch – with the sequence being followed by an extreme close up of the Whore in horizontal profile as she smiles and writhes around on her back with what appears to be semen running down her cheek. Not only is this an example of Khavn's attempt to create non-cinema, but it is also an example of his conscientious abjection.

Conscientious abjection

In her classic study of abjection, Julia Kristeva draws upon the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline to suggest that the abject is ‘neither subject nor object’ (Kristeva 1982: 135) – although the abject does share one quality with the object, ‘that of being opposed to I’ (Kristeva 1982: 1). In other words, the abject opposes the subject (being an ‘I’), but is not fully an object, because the abject can still do things and is not entirely passive, as we shall see shortly.

It should be immediately apparent, though, that this primary definition already has resonance with Khavn’s *Ruined Heart*. For, in making a film in which the characters do not have names and personalities so much as roles, Khavn immediately deprives his characters of subjectivity/being an ‘I,’ and instead puts them into an area where they are in-between, or in what Kristeva, again after Céline, might call a ‘non-state’ (Kristeva 1982: 135). Set in the slums of Manila, *Ruined Heart* also takes place in a kind of literal non-state: this is the Philippines, but this is not the Philippines of tourist advertising or that of the *bourgeois* mainstream cinema that the country produces; and these are not political subjects whose voices are heard by those who govern the country, but they are the left behind, the outcast, the thrown away, the abject (from the Latin *ab-*, meaning ‘away’ and *jectus*, meaning ‘thrown’).

Pushing further, though, Kristeva aligns abjection with dirt, filth, rot and faeces – but not simply because these things are the opposite of cleanliness, or what we might call ‘proper’ life (from the French word *propre*, meaning ‘clean’). Rather, these things are linked with abjection because they challenge boundaries. As Kristeva explains, it is

not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior... Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are ever more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. (Kristeva 1982: 4)

Again, in her list of archetypes, including the criminal, we are once again reminded of Khavn’s film. Indeed, from his opening murder of the man in broad daylight with the screwdriver, it seems clear that the Criminal in *Ruined Heart* respects no rules and does indeed expose the fragility of the law, especially as it applies to life in Manila’s slums. That is, the slums are a lawless zone, with the Godfather himself also being a violent criminal even though he is supposed to represent order and the government.

I shall return later to the idea of respecting borders in relation to cosmopolitanism, but to continue with Kristeva, it might also be worth noting how she equally discusses hallucinations in relation to abjection, suggesting that the senseless nature of the hallucination, which does not represent anything identifiable, also places the hallucination in the realm of the abject (Kristeva 1982: 46). This applies not so much to the plot of *Ruined Heart*, but also to its style: the film is hallucinatory in its strangeness and weird symbolism, with Kristeva adding that ‘abjection... is a universal phenomenon; one encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization’ (Kristeva 1982: 68). In other words, Khavn clearly understands that there are symbols in human civilization, but he uses them in such a way as to disrupt the

easy order of those symbols – meaning that we respond to his film as much if not more on an affective level as we do on a cognitive or intellectual level.

In being hard to understand, his symbols (like the horse's head or the *balut*) take on an abject quality that challenges easy reading. Indeed, Khavn's insistence on archetypes instead of characters helps to convey the role that cinema has played in constituting contemporary humanity's 'symbolic and/or social dimension' – while at the same time subverting it. And where Khavn's use of star performers like Tadanobu Asano and even Christopher Doyle might suggest that Khavn's study in abjection is empty or false (since a star is identifiably a subject/an 'I' as a result of their celebrity, as well as being an easy-to-recognise symbol, typically of power as a result of their very stardom), Khavn subverts their subjectivity by making Asano wear a horse's head and by covering his body with tattoos, while also regularly removing the camera from Doyle's hands and placing GoPros in the hands of performers like Asano. With regard to Doyle, this means that the cinematographer does not on many occasions shoot the film at all, while Khavn also deprives Asano of a voice, in that he barely says anything throughout the whole film.

Kristeva quotes Céline again: '[i]f one no longer sings, one passes away, one no longer conceives children, one locks oneself up in a movie theater just to forget one exists' (Kristeva 1982: 179). In creating a film that involves numerous musical sequences and in which appear numerous children, it would appear that Khavn's film is a celebration of life and a kind of activity as opposed to passivity – even if these people that we see are not subjects but abject (they are the 'thrown away' of Philippine society). Given that 'locking oneself up in a movie theater' is considered by Céline to be antithetical to that life, we can perhaps sense how Khavn wishes to make a non-film: it is through non-cinema that we can get back to life, music and children.

If *Ruined Heart* wishes to celebrate some sort of life that is antithetical to cinema and to the values of a cinematic/neoliberal society that only deems certain types of people worthy of being visible and thus subjects, death is nonetheless also a constant presence in *Ruined Heart*. From the opening montage of newspaper stories about murder through to the Criminal's initial killing, the *balut* and the film's climax in the necropolis: death is never far from the world of Manila's slums. But it is not that death is simply the antithesis of life. Rather, *Ruined Heart* portrays a world somehow suspended between death and life – in the realm of the abject. As Kristeva explains: '[a]bjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, a new significance' (Kristeva 1982: 15). The reference to *Tampopo* helps to convey the liminal space that the abject occupies between life and death: the embryo is dead, but it feeds the human while also being involved here in an erotic encounter that in some senses is also a celebration of life (given that sex is a regular step towards procreation).

I shall explore in further detail below how the necropolis also plays a key role in the film's *mise-en-scène* for conveying how the abjected poor of Manila are also somewhere between life and death, but I wish to end this section by suggesting that like the criminal who consciously commits murder, Khavn also is conscious of and conscientious in creating a non-cinema of abjection – as made clear by the reference to *Tampopo* (among other films). That is, Khavn clearly situates *Ruined Heart* within a world of cinematic representations, even if his film is also an anti-representation. Drawing on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas, Kristeva defines impurity as 'that which departs from the symbolic order,' meaning that impurity is also linked to abjection. Meanwhile, Khavn has himself written a manifesto titled 'The 12

Bowowows of Impurity.’ A biting of his thumb at the ‘Vow of Chastity’ signed by the original Dogme 95 directors (Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring), in it Khavn proposes an impure, digital and Philippine cinema. Not only does the manifesto again show how Khavn situates himself and his work within contemporary cinematic practice, but it also shows him using impurity to resist the contemporary ‘symbolic order’ (here by becoming a ‘dogman’ – a chimerical human-animal filmmaker who functions somewhere other than dogme; see Baumgärter 2012: 119-122). In short, then, Khavn is a filmmaker who explores abjection both in terms of form and content. He does not so much object conscientiously to contemporary and other cinemas (he does after all engage specifically with von Trier and Itami, for example), as abject cinema itself, filling his film with people and moments that may well have been ‘thrown away’ by other filmmakers insistent uniquely upon delivering a clear and clean/proper story. Khavn’s dirty, impure film thus constitutes a form of conscientious abjection.

Abject cosmopolitanism

In working with Asano, Acevedo and Doyle, and in making references to filmmakers as diverse as Itami and von Trier, Khavn clearly demonstrates a strong understanding of contemporary film and film history. Such a display of cultural capital would suggest that he is a cosmopolitan filmmaker in the sense defined by sociologists like Ulrich Beck and theorists like Anthony Cooper and Chris Rumford. For both Beck and for Cooper and Rumford, cosmopolitanism is defined by mobility and an ability to cross borders (see Beck and Sznaider 2006; Cooper and Rumford 2011). In this sense, cosmopolitanism affirms borders even as processes of globalisation are supposed to dissolve borders in a world of high-speed ultra-connectivity. It may be that borders have changed, in that borders can now be ‘remote and distant from the territory they are designed to protect,’ and that borders nowadays “control mobility rather than territory,” but under globalisation it would appear that “borders are everywhere” (Cooper and Rumford 2011: 263). To be cosmopolitan, then, is to be able to cross borders – and in his demonstration of understanding film and film culture, Khavn would seem to be in the privileged position of being able to cross borders, especially as his films play at film festivals and in other locations all around the world.

Given that his films are about people who cannot so easily cross borders within the Philippines, let alone internationally, one might accuse Khavn of some sort of hypocrisy: he crosses borders while the subjects (or ‘abjects’) of his films, perhaps including *Ruined Heart*, do not. In some senses valid, this critique might be mitigated by the way in which Khavn has significantly less success and recognition internationally than his fellow Philippine filmmakers Lav Diaz and Brillante Mendoza, who have won prizes at the Berlin, Cannes, Locarno and Venice Film Festivals (among others). More importantly, though, Khavn’s films are clearly about mobility and borders, meaning that his films are about cosmopolitanism, regardless of whether Khavn himself is a ‘privileged’ cosmopolitan and global citizen. And given that his films are about abjection in addition to possessing an ‘abject’ style, it would make sense that his films demonstrate what Peter Nyers (2003) has termed an abject cosmopolitanism.

For Nyers, cosmopolitanism is also about the ability to cross borders. However, the focus of his work is those people who are criminalized for crossing borders that they should not – namely refugees and economic migrants who become abject by virtue of not being citizens (or subjects) of the places to which they move.

Firstly, we get a sense here of the classed nature of cosmopolitanism, in that mobility and the crossing of borders is for those who can afford to do so legitimately, while those (typically poorer) people who cannot afford it are indeed cast out and thus abject. But secondly we also can learn from this how ‘abject cosmopolitanism’ describes not a *problematic cosmopolitanism for the abject*, but rather a *problematizing cosmopolitanism of the abject*’ (Nyers 2003: 1075). That is, cosmopolitanism does not so much exclude the abject as the abject challenges definitions of cosmopolitanism.

Nyers goes on to suggest that sovereignty is equally a part of this problematic cosmopolitanism. For the concept of a sovereign self also turns the abject-foreigner into an enemy other – or someone to be deported (Nyers 2003: 1079). As *sans papiers* in France and refugees in Australia fight for their rights – rights that they do not yet have because they are not subjects, but their fighting for which also demonstrates that they are not objects, and thus are somewhere in between subject and object, i.e. abject – this ‘abject cosmopolitanism constitutes a very difficult moment for the state. Through an impossible activism – “impossible” because the non-status do not possess the “authentic” identity (i.e. citizenship) that would allow them to be political, to be an activist – they make visible the violent paradoxes of sovereignty’ (Nyers 2003: 1080). And here we can see abject cosmopolitanism in *Ruined Heart* because although the film is not about refugees or *sans papiers* living abroad, the film is nonetheless about poor Filipinos who equally are ‘non-status’/‘non-state’ and who thus trouble the idea of the singular sovereign and cosmopolitan nation. That is, the Philippines may wish to be a cosmopolitan nation that is sovereign, but in reality it is a nation that has 43 per cent of its capital’s population living in squats/slums (Tolentino 2001: 159), with those slum dwellers (which is not to mention Filipinos working overseas) being the price of that sovereignty. More than this: as a nation that has been colonized in turn by Spain and by the USA over a 300-year period, Manila’s slum dwellers become a reminder of how the Philippines as a whole is a kind of ‘abject’ nation whose apparent sovereignty is really predicated upon ongoing imperialism/economic dependence and the corruption that has typified numerous Philippine governments since the regime of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos.

In this way, Khavn’s use of international stars like Asano, Acevedo, Kazan and Doyle takes on an ironic meaning. By giving them no names, no lines, by disguising them and putting them through abject situations/by taking the cameras out of their hands, Khavn deprives them of various aspects of their stardom. Khavn also brings these international stars into the slums of Manila in order to make his film, thereby confronting their cosmopolitanism with abjection. Finally, by bringing foreign stars to the slums of Manila, Khavn reverses the typical trajectory of overseas Filipino workers, thereby reinforcing the sense in which their abjection remains invisible, confined to the off-screen, in a realm perhaps outside of cinema, in non-cinema.

In her application of cosmopolitan theory to film, Maria Rovisco writes about how making films across borders can provide a cosmopolitan experience for the filmmakers – and this may well apply to *Ruined Heart* with its cast and crew from the Philippines, Japan, Mexico, Germany and elsewhere (see Rovisco 2013: 149). However, I shall challenge Rovisco’s hope that cosmopolitan cinema about the plight of the excluded can generate cross-cultural empathy (Rovisco 2013: 153), not because she is necessarily wrong, but because she speaks really only of a certain type of cosmopolitan cinema. Or, if Rovisco’s definition of cosmopolitan cinema is correct, then perhaps we need a new term to help us better to understand *Ruined Heart*. With

this in mind, I shall define the latter as an example of chaomopolitan cinema. But first, I shall consider further the role of death in *Ruined Heart*.

Necropolitics and space

Rovisco is correct to suggest that filmmakers who shoot on location are in some senses cosmopolitan, since this is ‘consequential for how landscape and setting has more than background significance, functioning instead as a foreground – and, to an extent, as the subject of the film’ (Rovisco 2013: 155-156). With regard to *Ruined Heart*, I would say that location shooting is key: the slums of Manila that characterize the film are perhaps the overwhelming visual component of the film, meaning that Khavn’s movie is as much if not more about this space than it is about the otherwise anonymous and archetypal main characters, whose story Khavn deliberately obfuscates, as we have seen.

Rovisco also invokes the work of Giorgio Agamben, explaining how ‘border zones continue to be constituted as concrete and bounded sites of physical containment and displacement (e.g. detainment centres, refugee camps) where movement is stopped and where conditions of existence are reduced to what Agamben has called “bare life” (life exposed to death)’ (Rovisco 2013: 151). Agamben’s discussion of bare life forms part of his consideration of the *homo sacer*, or the human who is condemned to die and so who can be killed at any point in time (see Agamben 1998). A disposable being, the *homo sacer* is given contemporary form in the human sacrificed to the god of capital, the necessary human cost that allows some and not others to benefit from capital. That is, those who have a ‘bare life’ are excluded from capital, their exclusion and poverty allowing the rich to remain rich, since no money need be spent on the excluded poor – because they are excluded. Thus, even though Manila’s slums are not a detainment center or a refugee camp, they are nonetheless a space in which the poor are ‘exposed to death,’ as per the insistence of death in *Ruined Heart*, perhaps especially its final moments in Manila’s North Cemetery.

Meanwhile, in his consideration of ‘necropolitics,’ Achille Mbembe also draws upon Agamben, *inter alia*, to pursue the issue of how ‘the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die’ (Mbembe 2003: 11). That is, echoing Cooper and Rumford, sovereignty breeds its enemies, with Mbembe arguing that colonies have functioned historically like frontiers/borders. That is, colonies ‘are not organized in a state form and have not created a human world... They do not establish a distinction between combatants and non-combatants, or again between an “enemy” and a “criminal”’ (Mbembe 2003: 24). The colonized is simply sub-human, criminalized and “natural” human beings who lack the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, “so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they have committed murder”’ (Mbembe 2003: 24). In this way, the colonized were relegated into ‘a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood’ – and which here I am calling abjecthood (see Mbembe 2003: 26).

The relevance to *Ruined Heart* should be clear. As a formerly colonized nation that is still subject to imperial dependency, the Filipino emerges as sub-human, whose life can be taken without it being considered murder – hence why life is cheap in the film’s world, as cars continue about their everyday business without stopping to consider the dead body that lies by the roadside during the opening credits, and the value of whose life seems to lie under that of even the rabbit, the pig and other animals – as per the watercolour in the Criminal’s garret. Necropolitics for Mbembe

thus involves the ‘creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*’ (Mbembe 2003: 40), an argument that Eugene Thacker has also made recently in his study of the ‘body politic’ (see Thacker 2015: 52-57). How apt it is that *Ruined Heart* ends precisely in a necropolis, where various Filipinos genuinely live, situated as they are between the living and the dead, or both at once. Again, the abjected people who inhabit these spaces bespeak a colonial history and the ongoing imbalance of life under contemporary neoliberalism – with various of the mausoleums in the necropolis being larger than the slum dwellings in Manila. Even in death, the rich have greater space than the living.

The roads through the necropolis are considerably wider and better lit than the alleyways of the film’s slums. It is significant that the flight of the Whore and the Criminal from the scene of the murder with the screwdriver involves the Whore banging her head against a low pipe: mobility in Manila’s slums is difficult. Indeed, the various sequences that involve the Criminal, the Whore and the Godfather in a tryke (a sort of tuktuk) and the Criminal and the Whore in the Beetle may suggest some freedom of movement, but these are offset by the claustrophobic sense of two or three people crammed into a small vehicle and which is emphasized by the intimacy of the camera that the Criminal holds at arm’s length. Without space for a cinematographer, the actors have to film themselves, as the Criminal also does at times as he wanders through the slum’s alleys.

As mentioned, this emphasis on space and place is central to cosmopolitan cinema as defined by Maria Rovisco, while also being core to Celestino Deleyto’s consideration of cosmopolitan film. In a recent essay, Deleyto engages with two films, *Io Sono Li/Shun Li and the Poet* (Andrea Segre, Italy/France, 2011) and *Margaret* (Kenneth Lonergan, USA, 2011). The first is a clearly transnational film with a multinational cast and which tells the story of an immigrant Chinese labourer who befriends a man from the former Yugoslavia now living in Chioggia, a town close to Venice, Italy, where the locals speak a mixture of Italian and Venetian. The latter, meanwhile, is about a self-absorbed teenager, Lisa (Anna Paquin), living in New York.

In *Io Sono Li*, we see the process of *acqua alta*, whereby seawater rises up above the banks of the city and into the buildings of Chioggia. The *acqua alta* is a contrapuntal metaphor for the film’s engagement with border crossings and transnationalism. That is, Li and the poet have reached Chioggia from China and the former Yugoslavia respectively, but they cannot so easily integrate into Italian society, even if the locals are happy for water to seep up into their homes from the sea below. It would seem, then, that some border crossings are acceptable (flooding), while others not (migrants) (Deleyto 2016: 8-11). Meanwhile, although *Margaret* does not feature any literal border crossings, the film nonetheless critiques the small-mindedness of its characters in post-11 September 2001 New York as characters from various different backgrounds (both national and socioeconomic) fail to get along – even though New York might claim to be among the most cosmopolitan places on Earth (Deleyto 2016: 11-16). But where both films demonstrate a lack of the cross-cultural empathy that Rovisco sees as being key to cosmopolitanism, the films both formally involve a cosmopolitan openness to others in various different ways. In *Io Sono Li*, we see this through the inclusion of the real-world *acqua alta* as a result of shooting on location in Chioggia, while in *Margaret*, the soundtrack suddenly switches from conversations featuring the main characters to moments when we more clearly hear the conversations of background characters (who will not reappear in the

film). Such formal strategies constitute for Deleyto a ‘cosmopolitan moment’ – ‘a moment of openness to the other that brings about reflexive transformation’ (Deleyto 2016: 2).

We can once again read *Ruined Heart* through Deleyto’s cosmopolitan framework: the real-world locations together with the use of non-professional actors helps to create a ‘cosmopolitan’ film that, in its fragmentary construction, also suggests an openness to the other as Khavn downplays dialogue for music, musical sequences and hallucinations. But where this might constitute a cosmopolitan cinema, I wish to push beyond Rovisco and Deleyto and propose that it constitutes a chaosmopolitan cinema.

Chaosmopolitanism

Both Deleyto and Rovisco’s examples of cosmopolitan cinema are films made in very good taste: *Io Sono Li*, *Margaret*, *Kandahar* (Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Iran/France, 2001) and *In This World* (Michael Winterbottom, UK, 2002) are all examples of films that might contain shocking but not necessarily offensive material. The same cannot quite be said of *Ruined Heart* with its sexual and violent images. Furthermore, unlike Rovisco’s examples (*Kandahar* and *In This World*), *Ruined Heart* is a Philippine film made by a Philippine director rather than a film made about a culture (Afghanistan) by an outsider to that culture (an Iranian and a Briton respectively). My point here is that the four examples of cosmopolitan cinema given by Deleyto and Rovisco are of films that are easy to follow, with *In This World* in particular featuring a documentary-style voiceover that helps to explain to its audiences the status of contemporary refugees, including the ones from Afghanistan whom the film depicts. *Ruined Heart*, meanwhile, is significantly harder to follow, being chaotic even, with the fact that Khavn is not necessarily speaking for anyone else playing a key role in this process.

This ‘chaotic’ aspect of Khavn’s film allows to take our first step towards chaosmopolitanism. For, if cosmopolitanism is being open to otherness, then it must also be openness not only to specific kinds of otherness. In cinematic terms, this means being open not simply to the easy-to-follow formal strategies of the so-called festival film, but also openness to more radical formal otherness: a story not-so-well-told (according to the standards of conventional filmmaking), to the otherness of non-narrative cinema in which story plays only a secondary role. Chaosmopolitanism, then, is openness to the kind of otherness that *Ruined Heart* features. Perhaps only a filmmaker steeped in that otherness can produce such work, while Winterbottom and Makhmalbaf are too steeped in their own cinematic traditions to be able to do this. The affective register of *Ruined Heart* only serves to make this clear; it is a film that is hard to understand, but it certainly makes us feel different things. It is a film that asks whether cinema is open to its own other, namely non-cinema.

More than this, though, *Ruined Heart* constitutes a chaosmopolitan film by taking us beyond the spatial borders of the contemporary world and into the realm of its temporal borders. On a primary level, this temporal chaosmopolitanism can be seen in how the film seems to present sequences in a jumbled (dis)order. As *Ruined Heart* features moments in which the Criminal wears the cast followed by moments in which he does not, we get a sense that the film is presented to us non-chronologically; not just different places, then, but different moments in time are given equal status, as is also made clear by the presence within the film of fantasy, dream or hallucinatory sequences. As per Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the time-image, the different temporalities of external/objective reality and internal/subjective perception become

muddled (Deleuze 2005), taking us into a realm that is neither or perhaps both at the same time, the realm of the abject, where we see the times not just of the living but also of the dead, as well as the time of the abject living dead/the 'bare lives' of the *homo sacer* that inhabits Manila's slums.

On a secondary level, we can now get to grips with a further temporal aspect of chaomopolitanism. For if globalization brings about a homogenization of time, whereby in a globally connected world we can be in contact with people on the far side of the globe in 'real time,' then globalization also brings about a world that beats to the singular rhythm of neoliberal capital, in which *now* is the only time that is considered to be real, and in which the slow and the stopped are excluded and consigned into unreality. And yet, those excluded from globalization – namely the poor – are indeed real, even if they live at different rhythms. *Ruined Heart* offers an attempt to show these different temporalities through its constant changes of pace (including various slow motion shots), through its unstable diegesis in which fantasy blurs with reality, and through its deliberate deconstruction of the tropes of genre cinema (archetypal characters, etc) in favour of a more radical non-cinema. In this way, chaomopolitanism brings to mind not just the spatial borders of the contemporary world, but also the temporal ones as people lead different lives at rhythms different to that of neoliberal/globalized capital, much as the lives of what Eric Cazdyn terms the 'already dead' are different to/other than those of lives led at the pace of the cinematic mode of production (see Cazdyn 2012; for more on chaomopolitanism, see also Brown 2017).

Conclusion: From Corruption to Cœur-age

Khavn de la Cruz's *Ruined Heart: Another Love Story Between A Criminal and A Whore* thus constitutes an example of conscientious abjection in addition to being an example of chaomopolitan cinema. This is not simply to shock, even if *Ruined Heart* clearly is intended to be provocative. By provoking an encounter with a Philippine otherness, the film does indeed invite openness towards and perhaps empathy with the excluded slum dwellers of Manila on the part of the viewer. But this is an openness not just to a different place, but also to a different time or set of temporalities. Given its history of colonialism and imperialism, the Philippines is a nation the sovereignty of which is based upon historical and ongoing exclusions. Those exclusions are the logical consequence of the economic logic of capital; they also are the logical consequence of a life led not with one's heart (based upon empathy) but with one's head (based upon capital). Small wonder it is that the Philippines has a 'ruined heart,' its core/*cœur* ('heart' in French) ruptured as a result of corruption. By watching and being open to the different spaces and times of *Ruined Heart*, however, we can perhaps re-connect with our hearts (perhaps it is no coincidence that the first democratically-elected President of the Philippines after the Marcos regime was called Corazon Aquino), and find the courage (or be en-*cœur*-aged) to look beyond neoliberal capital and to realise an inclusive world in which bare lives are understood to matter as much as cosmopolitan ones.

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen), Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Baumgärtel, Tilman (ed.) (2012) *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Essays, Documents, Interviews*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

- Beck, Ulrich, and Natan Sznaider (2006) 'Unpacking cosmopolitanism for the social sciences: a research agenda,' *The British Journal of Sociology*, 57:1, pp. 1-23.
- Beller, Jonathan (2006) *The Cinematic Mode of Production: Attention Economy and the Society of the Spectacle*, Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England.
- Beller, Jonathan (2013) 'Advertisarial Relations and the Aesthetics of Survival,' in Michael A. Peters, Tina (A.C.) Besley and Daniel Araya (eds.), *The New Development Paradigm: Education, Knowledge Economy and Digital Futures*, New York: Peter Lang, pp. 35-50.
- Brown, William (2016) 'Non-Cinema: Digital, Ethics, Multitude,' *Film-Philosophy*, 20, pp. 104-130.
- Brown, William (2017) 'Chaosmopolitan Cinema: Cinema, Globalisation, Holocaust,' *wjrcbrown on film*, 23 February, <https://wjrcbrown.wordpress.com/2017/02/23/chaosmopolitan-cinema-cinema-globalisation-holocaust/>. Accessed 27 July 2017.
- Brown, William (2018) *Non-Cinema: Global Digital Filmmaking and the Multitude*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Cazdyn, Eric (2012) *The Already Dead: The New Time of Politics, Culture and Illness*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cooper, Anthony, and Chris Rumford (2011) 'Cosmopolitan Borders: Bordering as Connectivity,' in Maria Rovisco and Magdalena Nowicka (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*, London: Ashgate, pp. 261-276.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2005) *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta), London: Continuum.
- Deleyto, Celestino (2016) 'Looking from the border: a cosmopolitan approach to contemporary cinema,' *Transnational Cinemas*, 0:0, pp. 1-18.
- Kristeva, Julia (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez), New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mbembe, Achille (2003) 'Necropolitics' (trans. Libby Meintjes), *Public Culture*, 15:1, pp. 11-40.
- Nyers, Peter (2003) 'Abject Cosmpolitanism: the politics of protection in the anti-deportation movement,' *Third World Quarterly*, 24:6, pp. 1069-1093.
- Rovisco, Maria (2013) 'Towards a Cosmopolitan Cinema: Understanding the Connection Between Borders, Mobility and Cosmopolitanism in the Fiction Film,' *Mobilities*, 8:1, pp. 148-165.
- Thacker, Eugene (2015) *Tentacles Longer Than Night: Horror of Philosophy Vol. 3*, Winchester: zero books.
- Tolentino, Rolando B. (2001) 'Cityscape: The Capital Infrastructuring and Technologisation of Manila,' in Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds.), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 158-170.