Clara Law’s Construction of Postmodern Nature in the Film The Goddess of 1967

Dian Li
University of Arizona
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ABSTRACT

The Goddess of 1967 (2000) may be the most philosophical of the Australian/Hong Kong director Clara Law's films. It exhibits Law's cinematic aesthetics: poetic films that emphasize tonality and atmospheres over cause-effect narratives. All rhetorical devices such as framing, color, image, texture and composition serve to extend the film's penetrating power to the inner world of its characters. The visual world of The Goddess of 1967-the characters, the landscape of the Outback and the steel and glass mammoths of Tokyo-is painted with color blocks in high contrast and thus becomes strangely familiar. The film is a sort of "dialogue with the landscape," through which damaged souls can be repaired. The two protagonists' journey from the exterior to the interior points to the twin strands of transnationalism and postmodernism that come out powerfully and convincingly through a sustained tension between nature and culture. In re-configuring nature in transnational space, Clara Law tries to constitute the self and the other imaginatively and untangles their complicated relationship in a magnificent fashion, offering a spectacle of the postmodern self in crisis and in need of redemption through nature. Meanwhile, nature, through an engendering process, is being transformed from a mere instrument of personal salvation into the very constitution of transnationality and postmodernity.

Keywords: Clara Law, Goddess of 1967

The Goddess of 1967
尋找1967的女神
Director: Clara Law
Zhou Yang, 羅卓鑾, Screenwriters: Fong Ling-ching, 方令正 and Clara Law.
Cast: Rose Byrne (B.G.), Kikyua Kurokawa, 水瀨正敏 (J.M.), Nicholas Hope (Grandfather), Elise McCredie (Mary)

The guiding myth, then, inspiring the invention of cinema, is...a re-creation of the world in its own image.

—André Bazin

L'image cinématographique est exactement elle-même, elle nous fait regarder le monde comme s'il était un corps nu (The cinematic image is exactly itself; it makes us to look at the world in its naked state).

—Pier Paolo Pasolini

Clara Law is one talented director to emerge from the remarkable success of the 'Second Wave' Hong Kong cinema. The Second Wave came of age in the mid-
1980s and is still the mainstay of Hong Kong's art cinema. Members of the Second Wave such as Wong Kar-wai and Stanley Kwan have caught the world by surprise with their novel aesthetics and bold experimentation in cinematic language. Thematically, the Second Wave directors are linked together by their socially engaging attitude, their commitment to history, and their interest in the identity of Hong Kong as a place and a people—all issues of currency during the years preceding and following the 1997 handover of the city-state to China. In contrast to Wong's characteristic lyrical depiction of urban alienation and loneliness and Kwan's meditative monologue on sexuality and identity, Clara Law's films are a poetic representation of the Chinese Diaspora. Through meaning-laden images and provocative framing, Law leads us to the inner world of those who travel and migrate and in whom we vicariously experience the trauma of cultural clashes and the bliss of self-emancipation. Diaspora, for Law, is the ultimate paradox of modern life, a metaphor for all our ambiguities and contradictions in viewing the Self through the prism of the Other, in which pain and pleasure, rebirth through loss, and redemption after the fall are writ large via the singularity of living in different cultures. Law's brilliance as a filmmaker lies in her ability to capture this paradox on the screen truthfully, credibly and memorably.

Clara Law was born in Macau in 1957 but moved to Hong Kong at the age of 10. Law studied at the University of Hong Kong and graduated with a degree in English literature. In 1978 she began to work at Radio Television Hong Kong, which was spearheading an ambitious project of self-transformation in Hong Kong's television industry. With financial assistance from the government and direct involvement of the film studios, it sought to vastly improve its programming, especially its drama programs, by aggressively recruiting young talents. New Wave directors (such as Ann Hui, Yim Ho and Patrick Tam) were invited to cement the linkage between television and filmmaking and, more importantly, to provide artistic guidance. Under their tutelage, many Second Wave directors honed their trade skills with great success. For several years, Law would try her hand at all aspects of the television business, from production to scriptwriting to direction. When she was done with Radio Television Hong Kong, she had a total of twelve drama programs to her credit, many of which earned critical acclaim. From 1982 to 1985, Law studied film direction and writing at the National Film and Television School in England. She returned to Hong Kong in 1985 and started to develop her first long feature film The Other Half and the Other Half, which was released in 1988. The following years, during which she made films at the rate of nearly one per year, were Law's most prolific. Among her best-known work are The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus (1989), Autumn Moon (1992), Temptation of a Monk (1993), and Wonton Soup (1994), all of which are award-winning and

critically acclaimed films. In 1994, Law and her longtime collaborator and partner Eddie Fong moved to Australia, where she has since made three films: *Floating Life* (1995), and *The Goddess of 1967* (2000), and *Letters to Ali* (2004) and continues to attract international attention.¹

In *The Goddess of 1967*, one finds a clear echo of Clara Law’s past works: the theme of isolation and displacement, the unlikely pairing of characters against the backdrop of unusual landscapes, the metaphor of travel and journey across national and cultural boundaries, and the romantic search for self-identity that often proves to be unattainable and ambiguous. While it is common to see a director keep going back to her favorite subject matter, we do expect variation in repetition, surprises in the familiar. Indeed variations and surprises are plentiful in *The Goddess of 1967*. While Law has always been a director of *auteur film*,² well- bent on innovative cinematography and unconventional narrative structures, *The Goddess of 1967* represents a new level of boldness and sophistication unseen in Law’s previous films. It most clearly exhibits Law’s cinematic aesthetics: poetic films that emphasize tonality and atmospheres over cause-effect narratives. All rhetorical devices such as framing, color, image, texture and composition serve to extend the film’s penetrating power to the inner world of its characters. The film’s stunning visuality, whether the pristine panorama of the Outback or the steel and glass mammoths of Tokyo, is painted with corrupt colors in high contrast to promote a sort of “dialogue with the landscape,” through which damaged souls commiserate and seek deliverance. The two protagonists’ journey from the exterior to the interior points to the twin strands of transnationalism and postmodernism, which come out powerfully and convincingly through a sustained tension between nature and culture. In re-configuring nature in transnational space, Clara Law tries to constitute the self and the other imagically and untangles their complicated relationship in a magnificent fashion to reveal a spectacle of the postmodern self in crisis and in need of redemption through nature. Meanwhile, nature, through an engendering process, is being transformed from a mere instrument of personal salvation into the very constitution of transnationality and postmodernity.

The film’s fragmented storyline centers on a triangular relationship between man, machine and nature. J.M. (Rikiya Kurokawa) is a hip young Japanese salaryman and a fan of the famed French cult car Citroën DS, otherwise known as “the goddess of 1967.” He finds one on the Internet and turns up in Sydney to collect it. He is met by a young blind woman by the name of “B.G.” (Rose Byrne),

¹ In writing this section, I have consulted Zhang Yingjun, ed. 1998, Yue 1999 and various internet websites.

² The idea of *auteur film* was first mentioned by Andrew Sarris in the article “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, Mast and Cohen eds. 1979:650-665. Intellectually indebted to the French New Novel, *auteur film* emphasizes the privileged role of the director, whose technical competence and ability to project to the world a vision of cinema are the beginning and the end of film. The director, as Andrew Sarris puts it, is “the clan of the soul” in the filmmaking process.

³ She has since become an international sensation for playing Brises, the love interest of Brad Pitt’s Achilles in the film *Troy* in 2004.
who explains that the sellers are dead but if he still wants the car, she can help him find the Citroën's real owner, who lives about a five-days drive away in the heart of the Outback. As they drive through the bush, the film flashes back to the past, and the past is not pretty. It turns out that J.M. is a bank robber and a fugitive from the Japanese police and B.G. is a child victim of incest at the hands of her grandfather, who, as one has come to expect, is the real owner of the Citroën DS. The journey finally leads the couple to a deserted gold mine, where the grandfather lives in a state of madness. Unable to pull the trigger on the old man, B.G. walks out from her long-planned mission, a mission J.M. has strongly discouraged. The film ends with the two speeding blindly down a dirt road—one can take “blindly” in a literal sense, for J.M. has closed his eyes at B.G.’s urging. But as the credits roll up, we see the car slowing down and hear the engine spluttering.

This final image, despite its briskness and brevity, may have saved the film from its pedestrian drama, its apparent connection to the genre of the road movie, namely, the conventions of journey, adventure, revelation, and home. The spluttering engine of the Citroën DS may be a mere accidental interruption of J.M. and B.G.’s inspirational journey at the narrative level, but symbolically it means much more. It plays a cruel joke upon B.G.’s blindness-induced wisdom as well as upon the machine’s much-hyped technical perfection. More importantly, it almost turns the film into its own parody: having revisited the past, the two suffering souls are now stuck in the present because the trusted machine fails to deliver them to the future. To understand how Law reaches this powerful moment of impasse and ambiguity, we need to go back to the beginning of the film where the Citroën DS is presented as a fetishized object fraught with suspense and possibility and as a narrative trope of the transition from culture to nature.

The Goddess of 1967 starts with an aerial view of Tokyo at night, in which the airborne camera first slowly rolls over the city's skylines cast in a dreamy, blue color and then tracks on the elevated bullet train meandering through the forest of high-rise buildings that presents an endless vista of ultra-modern structures in steel and glass. Time stands still in this world of science fantasia as robot-like humans ride silently on this fast-moving vehicle that seems to be going nowhere in particular. If Clara Law's reconstruction of Tokyo's cityscape offers a visual abundance, this very visual abundance works to erase the particularity of the city as place, making it a familiar modern metropolis like any other. In an interesting article that discusses the idea of space and race in contemporary Japanese cinema, Yomota Inuhiko argues that the presentation of Tokyo as a postmodern place in films directed by Oshi Mamoru, Isawa Shunji and Sai Yoichi reflects visual and virtual cityscapes of multicultural and multilingual hybridity that “originate in the peculiarities of a place called Tokyo, shift towards a possible alternative Tokyo, and finally transform into a nationless metropolis that matches nowhere on earth.”

In her earlier film Autumn Moon (1992), Law uses exactly the same type of camera work, but to a greater extent, to describe Hong Kong against her surface

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6 Yomota Inuhiko 2003:80.
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Images: uniform apartment complexes appear small and imbalanced, traces of taillights seem to stand still on the labyrinth of elevated highways, and massive glass walls spell mysterious patterns of moonshine. In both films, few identifiable landmarks are seen, and characters interact in locations that are surely in Hong Kong or Tokyo, but they also can easily be somewhere else. Place for Clara Law then becomes an abstraction, interchangeable for its “sameness” in bearing the appearances of transnationality and postmodernity.

As a prominent member of the Second Wave in New Hong Kong Cinema, Clara Law’s representation of place through the twin prisms of transnationalism and postmodernity should come as no surprise. In his seminal study of Hong Kong Cinema anticipating the 1997 handover, Ackbar Abbas argues that the film of this time has become a collection of clichés signifying the angst of identity crisis and “the culture of disappearance,” in which clichés are recycled or a substituted with one cliché giving rise to another, much as a new building might be razed only to give space to an even newer one. This filmic image as “pathology of presence,” Abbas continues, is a reverse hallucination of what is not there, mirroring the widespread films of nostalgia in the 1980s that reenact the past as a keepsake.7 Abbas’s analysis of Hong Kong cinema, while providing much insight into its operational logic, seems to suggest that there is a way to represent Hong Kong that is ideologically free from the problems of representation itself. What if we take the paradox of “hallucination” and “reverse hallucination” as the paradox of Hong Kong itself at the point of a seismic event, including its identity as a place and a people? The paradox could then be taken as a strategy to negotiate between the self and a transnational space in constant mutation, and a device upon which a relationship with presence—either being there or not there—can be evaluated and redefined as necessary. Whether it is a collection of clichés to be consumed or a memory to be interpreted, presence itself becomes a narrativized object.

In both Autumn Moon and The Goddess of 1967, the place as a narrativized object serves to emphasize the motive of leaving. The characters in both films are stuck in the present and desperately want to leave it behind. Pui-Wai, the young fifteen-year-old protagonist of Autumn Moon, is about to emigrate to Canada to join her family8 and J.M. in The Goddess of 1967 is about to embark on his adventure in Australia. If leaving is an integral part of the transnational self-construction—the “trans” in transnationalism defines the self’s “in-between-ness” and signifies its never-ending movement, while postmodernism gives a purpose to the desire for leaving—then leaving the city, the site of modernization, means returning to nature, a place that has been imagined to be our origins and beginnings. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno have already described how modernity has triumphed over the back of nature and have theorized alienation from “blind domination” of nature as the central problem with Enlightenment.9 “Postmodernism,” the

7 Abbas 1997:26-35.
8 I have a paper that discusses, in great detail, the idea of “transnational leaving” in Autumn Moon. See Li Dian 2004:57-72.
9 Horkheimer and Adorno 1989:42.
prominent critic of postmodernism Fredric Jameson characterizes in a somewhat felicitous fashion, “is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good.” The absence of nature roars to a deafening degree in Clara Law’s presentation of Tokyo’s cityscape—the spectacles of man-made wonders cannot mask the city’s cold artificiality and its complete disconnect from the people living in it. There is no mistake that J.M. is alienated from his environs and the desire to leave is evident in every scene of his living moments. It seems that the very presence of the city’s modernity invokes its absent other—nature, the destination of an escape and in some sense, a return to the origin of the self.

This is how The Goddess of 1967 unfolds J.M.’s life in Tokyo to our eyes: in a long sequence shot that consists of vignettes of an ultramodern cityscape, we hear rock music blasting out of J.M.’s earphone and see a silent J.M. offering us his daily routine with a sense of mechanical numbness and detachment, riding on the bullet train, exercising on the treadmill, devouring noodles and lying in bed with his girlfriend, as if he were a dead man walking or at least were leading somebody else’s life but not his own. Only when he feeds his two pet snakes with dead mice does he crack a smile and break his silence: “Your dinner is here,” he says, affectionately, “freshly delivered, no preservatives.” While the image of two vicious snakes devouring mice is hardly a pleasant spectacle (the audience also gets a glimpse of J.M.’s extensive collection of exotic and threatening animals in the basement), it reveals to us that J.M. is a closet naturalist. That the animals are the center of his life and that he exhibits a tender heart towards his pets in comparison with its glaring absence from his relationship with his girlfriend reminds us of his lost innocence and repressed humanity. The contrast between J.M.’s choices highlights his sense of crisis and his desire to escape from the boredom of a high-tech life. It is a link, one might say, that will become his subliminal connection with the Australian Outback.

For the time being, however, the Citroën DS proves to be a stronger motivation for J.M. to travel from Tokyo to Australia. As we witness his uninteresting life unfolding, we also see his hands typing on a keyboard haggling about the price of the car. Using fancy newsreel techniques and slow motion shots accompanied by hymnal music, Clara Law presents the Citroën DS as the car of one’s dreams. The audience is fed with a series of facts and statistics: it was produced from 1955 to 1975, with a total production of 1,455,746 units and its advanced hydro-pneumatic suspension system saved President de Gaulle’s life from an assassination attempt in 1962. The Citroën DS, the film quotes Roland Barthes’s lavish praise, is something that “has fallen from the sky.” Little wonder that J.M. has fallen in love with the car and will go out of his way to possess one, for the Citroën DS has already been defined for him as something more than itself, and he is merely joining in this endless process of fetishization.

Simply put, fetishism in literary critical terms is an excessive attachment or transference of emotions to a material object. J.M.’s embrace of fetishism from the

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very beginning, however, is a dangerous game, and he evidently knows very little about its rules and consequences. First of all, the image of the Citroën DS itself is full of ambiguities and contradictions: it is futuristic but an old model, materialistic but inspirational, a commodity no longer in production but a symbol of man-made perfection. Secondly, fetishism creates the illusion of unreality by transferring into a material object a certain emotional affect; it suppresses materiality but can never eradicate it. It demonstrates in its original form, as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha have argued, the violent colonialist impulse to freeze and suspend living cultures outside of time and history in order to maintain a controlling distance from them.\(^{11}\) Not only is J.M. unaware of fetishism’s past association with colonialism but also materialism is precisely the root cause of his personal crisis. In flashbacks we learn that J.M. already leads a life of excess in Japan, but he wants still more. That is why he steals an untold sum of money from the bank using his computer skills. When his friend and accomplice dies in a freak traffic accident moments after announcing that he would not want a penny of the bounty, J.M. is left alone, heartbroken and confused about the meaning of their spectacular heist. Lacking his friend’s will and determination, J.M. chooses the least evil of all his options, that is, to purchase a fetishized object that transcends its materiality instead of either rotting in jail or enduring a life on the lam. The irony is that the Citroën DS benefits him precisely because of its materiality—a vehicle of transportation that leads him to B.G., who in turn will help him to demystify the French car. That is to say, J.M. will have to learn that the Citroën DS is a false pretense to nature despite its fetishized status; its mere “oldness” and alleged perfection cannot mask its reality as a piece of man-made machinery. It is, to put it simply, just a car, like any other.

There are two reasons that suggest the inevitability of the bonding between J.M. and B.G. in transnational space. First, fetishism circulates in the realm of differences—differences of cultures and people, and etymologically speaking, is rooted in intercultural and transnational encounters, as Williams Pietz has demonstrated in his impressive archeology of the term.\(^{12}\) Secondly, the Citroën DS represents J.M.’s sexual fantasy that compensates for the lack of imagination in his human relationship. Seen through J.M.’s eyes and described by the male voice-over, the Citroën DS is rendered, in an exaggerated fashion, as a gendered object. It is called “goddess,” which the French suffix “DS” (déesse, or goddess) already confirms verbally, is pink in color, and curves seductively. This, of course, invokes a not-so-subtle analogy between the car and B.G. Once this linguistic and visual analogy is established, the Citroën DS as a fetishized object starts to fade away and it becomes no more than a material witness to B.G.’s memory and past. The reconstruction of her personal history then extends the analogy to B.G. as nature, the meaning and significance of which to the transnational self-identity is what this film is really about.

Woman as nature is one of those dead metaphors that have attracted much attention in recent feminist scholarship. Writing against the familiar and traditional

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imagination of nature as feminine, Stacy Alaimo sees the root of a misogynist ideology in the formation of women mired in nature in which “women is not only constituted as nature, but nature is invoked to uphold the propriety of this very constitution.”13 But unlike the collective flight from nature advocated by early feminist scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir and Juliet Mitchel, Alaimo promotes a strategy of placing women within the discourse, which confuses the very categories of male and female, culture and nature, subject and object, rather than repeating the opposition between them. “Such situated theorizing, operating through a kind of grounded immersion rather than bodiless flight,” she writes, “is not only appropriate for environmental feminism but for all feminisms that refuse Cartesian models of knowledge, agency, and subjectivity.”14 After this shift from a debate about difference to a redefinition of nature itself, nature is no longer a repository of stasis and essentialism, no longer the mirror image of culture, and women’s agency resides in the very disruption of opposition between nature and culture—“a new space for feminism that neither totally affirms nor totally denies difference.”15 In this new space, a myriad of adulterated alternatives of women’s discursive formations will be enabled, in which the supremacy of culture will be challenged and nature will not be forever debased. Or as Mark Seltzer suggests, the question of culture versus nature will give way to the investigation of “how the relays between what counts as natural and what counts as cultural are differently articulated, invested, and regulated.”16

It is evident that Clara Law is a well-informed feminist filmmaker, for nature in The Goddess of 1967 is anything but a ground of fixed essences, rigid sexual differences, already apparent norms, values, and prohibitions; it is an open space of wilderness that remains undetermined, and an unspecified signified that is saturated with meanings in conflict with themselves. The movement of both J.M.’s and B.G.’s subjectivity is inscribed within nature—the lack of it for J.M. and the overabundance of it for B.G. If B.G. represents the end of J.M.’s flight into nature, it is not an end for his journey of self-redemption but an intermediary point for his continuing grapple with the meanings of nature, for the image of B.G as a “goddess,” almost at its very moment of establishment, becomes problematic and unstable, riddled with paradoxes. On the one hand, B.G. appears lovely, exquisite, feminine, and peaceful—the perfect mirror image of nature’s endowment. Her intimate knowledge of the natural world is in sharp contrast with J.M.’s lack of it when the two see a giant lizard on the road at the start of their journey in the Outback. Against B.G.’s advice, J.M., the glasshouse naturalist, stops the car and proceeds to capture the lizard, probably with the intention of expanding his pet collection. The lizard bites his finger and will not relent, which is followed by this memorable shot: under a white umbrella, a serene-looking B.G. and a distressed

13 Alaimo 2000:2.
15 Alaimo 2000.
J.M. wait patiently at the roadside for the lizard to release its victim. This humorous episode is more than a mere rehearsal of the familiar difference between a stupid tourist and a knowledgeable local, but it provides one of the many well-placed images that illustrate B.G. bonding with nature. On the other hand, B.G. not only carries with her the "unnatural" imperfection of blindness but also does things that can only be characterized as "unnatural" for a woman. She abandons her dead cousin's orphan, a lovely girl of no more than six years old, on the streets of Sydney, leaving her nothing but her parting words: "Call the police, but you must trust no one." While test-driving the Citroën DS for the first time, she sits in the passenger's seat with J.M. driving the car and enjoying his "heavenly bliss." Then two well-dressed thugs suddenly show up in a boxy car and for no apparent reason they try to bump the Citroën DS off the road. In contrast to a clueless and panic-stricken J.M., B.G. calmly takes out a handgun and shoots the thugs away. "I hate violence," B.G. deadpans to the dumbfounded J.M.

Thus B.G. becomes for us somewhat an enigma of nature. Her screen presence calls for the invocation of nature and at the same times repels her synonymy with nature. This is to say, she is both an inscription of nature and a transgression of it. Such a paradox underscores the trauma of her childhood that is forced upon her in the name of "nature." Throughout the film, the wonders of nature are on full display through countless and varied vistas of splendor, mysteriousness, and fury to form a context for B.G.'s traumatic experiences. More specifically, nature is there to provide shelter and protection when the incest becomes unbearable for her. Repeatedly we see a young B.G. running away from home and into the woods, her white pajamas fluttering amongst the high grass. A crying B.G. hugging an old tree at the break of dawn is perhaps the most enduring image of the entire film. Even as an adult, B.G. has to rely on nature to fend off her sexual predators. When the "drummer boy," a menacing-looking boxer from a traveling circus whom B.G. unwisely asks to be her companion on her trip to the city, assaults her, B.G. manages to get away and spends the night sleeping in the arms of an ancient tree. The image of B.G. in a fetal position protected by several dingoes suggests that B.G. is nature's child. It seems that her almost instinctual search for a mother from nature as a child has finally resulted in a silent but positive response from nature when she is an adult.

In this somewhat over-wrought image Clara Law transforms Mother Nature from a metaphor into a tangible figure. This is necessary because B.G.'s birth mother, Mary, has failed to be a mother. Mary's acquiescent complicity in the incest, as puzzling as it is, bears the symptom of a complete "unnatural" family situation. We learn that she grows up precociously after her own mother runs away with another man and that she herself has been the victim of incest by her father. So B. G., in all likelihood, is fathered by her grandfather and her blindness is a mark of her ignoble beginning, or as Mary puts it, is the sign of divine anger. This cycle of incestuous affairs continues all under the watchful eyes of something we usually call "culture." Take, for example, Mary's Christian faith. To B.G.'s every plea for help, Mary's response is to pray to God and to repeat the idea of sinfulness within oneself. When B. G. sees through the futility of her efforts, Mary can do
nothing but burn herself alive in an inferno as the ultimate sacrifice to a God who does not respond.

With the figure of Mary and her "unnatural behaviors" demanded by the force of culture, what has started as an unrelenting deconstruction of nature and its duality in the formation of women's subjectivity flows into an equally powerful critique of culture, and especially its function in the conception of nature. In doing so, Clara Law plays with the opposition of nature versus culture but does not dwell upon their essential differences; she focuses on the in-between-ness of nature and culture in which one is constitutive of the other and argues that violence against women cannot be naturalized by either. Particularly, Clara Law builds up Grandpa as a trope of culture and immediately complicates the singularity of this trope by his proximity to nature. Grandpa is a cultured man living in the wilderness, so to speak. He is, simultaneously, a suave dancer, a skilled fisherman, a good storyteller, a gourmet wine-maker, a miner, and a gold-digger in a literal sense. While the musical pieces accompanying his actions are classical masterpieces, he appears unshaven, always dressed in grubby, tattered clothes. In other words, the very presence of Grandpa recalls both a blending with and a differentiation from nature. There is no doubt, however, that Grandpa uses his knowledge of nature only for the purpose of exploiting it. He is, in some way, a repository of the collective image of man's unending violation of nature, and his closeness with nature only magnifies this violation. For each gold nugget he digs up, he commits a symbolic rape of the mother earth and there is a direct connection between this symbolic rape of the mother earth and his unspeakable physical crime against B.G.-both of which are defended in the name of nature. When finally confronted by Mary, Grandpa shoots back, "who said I can't make love to my granddaughter?" The implication is that incest is the "natural" thing for him to do because he is endowed with the power of nature. It was the same power of nature that centuries ago Jean-Jacques Rousseau invoked to write the "law of nature," which, among other things, created women "to please and be subjected to man."

Curiously, Mary has no answer to Grandpa's lame defense. She simply walks away and never comes back. Why does Clara Law let a dramatic moment slip away without comment? Why doesn't she have Mary take a stronger moral stance as the audience probably expects and demands? Perhaps it is because Law thinks that Grandfather's statement is so ridiculous that any response would unduly dignify it. Or it could be that both Law and Mary realize that any meaningful response would have to appeal to the authority of culture that Grandfather has in abundance at his disposal. Grandfather may have the appearance of a cave man, but he is well versed in culture and its dependence on nature as its other. If he is a product of his environment, that is a particular version of the corrupted environment that maintains the femininity of nature in order to perpetuate women's victimization. His rugged individuality reflects the beautiful but unforgiving landscape. He may also be called a naturalist, but of a different kind. the kind driven by a primordial, narcissistic desire, someone who

1' Quoted in Alaimo 2000:2
sustains himself by preying upon others. In his shadow, we see the dark side of nature ridden with violence, death, and destruction that is present in B.G.’s characterization alongside her tranquil and loving construction of nature. Metaphorically speaking, the very existence of Grandpa complicates the meanings of J.M.’s urge for a return to nature as an escape from the ruins of materialism, for a transnational movement is as much geophysical as symbolic and its significance depends on his own configuration of the place that he traverses. Even though Clara Law leaves no doubt that the demise of Grandfather is imminent and inevitable, that does not spell the end of the idea that nature is both beautiful and ugly, that it corrupts as well redeems. In fact, one can say that in The Goddess of 1967 there is not just one nature but several different versions of nature contending as well as co-existing with one another, each of which reflects a particular conception of nature as “human construction and representation.” And where Grandpa’s domination of nature ends is where B.G.’s liberation through nature begins.

The end of the film, in this sense, is just the beginning of J.M. and B.G. coming together in postmodern natures in which man and machine fuse into the landscape with a determined desire to travel but without a mapped destination to connect here and there. Donna J. Haraway, a cultural critic and women’s studies expert, has this to say about postmodernism and nature:

In the belly of the local/global monster in which I am gestating, often called the postmodern world, global technology appears to denature everything, to make everything a malleable matter of strategic decisions and mobile production and reproduction process. Technological decontextualization is ordinary experience for hundreds of millions if not billions of human beings, as well as other organisms. I suggest that this is not a denaturing so much as a particular production of nature [italics original].

As Stacy Alaimo points out, in releasing nature from its passive and subordinate role to human consciousness, Donna Haraway advocates the idea of the “artifactualism of nature,” which affirms the co-agency of human and non-humans. Nature is artifactual in the sense that it is something made, not something existing “out there” in certain essential, eternal and exploitable forms. Even though the artifactualism of nature can be critiqued as another form of appropriation, it transcends the nature/culture divide by encoding humans, animal, plants, and elements as “material-semiotic divide” who act out their particular production of nature in a “world full of cacophonous agencies,” an “unquiet multitude of nonhumans.” This is the world that J.M. and B.G. have come from and also the world in which they are presently stuck. Two young people of drastically different

18 Merchant 1996:221.
19 Haraway 1992:297
20 Alaimo 2000:138
21 Haraway 1992 297
backgrounds driving blindly into the future on a stalled Citroën DS is an image of respecting and trusting the will of Nature and is itself a nature in the making.

Clara Law’s tale of transnational travels through postmodern natures interestingly corresponds with her journey of transnational filmmaking. The film is her first English-speaking film with an entirely non-Chinese cast. Not unlike John Woo directing Hollywood stars, Law makes use of Australian financial and artistic resources to tell a universal story of dislocation and travel, which makes the film an extended example of the phenomenon of the so-called transnational Chinese cinema, a concept that has been given much currency by film critics such as Sheldon Lu and others in recent times. The Goddess of 1967 not only exhibits the typical characteristics of transnational Chinese cinema described by Sheldon Lu such as funding, distribution, targeted audience and film festival endorsements, but it depicts the formation of a transnational subjectivity that truly transcends national and cultural boundaries. This is perhaps where transnational Chinese cinema is going. In an interview, Clara Law has this to say about her directorial intention for the film: “Neither silent or moving. Neither perceivable nor imperceptible. Neither nothing or everything. A state of mystery, paradox, ambiguity. That is what I tried to capture in this film.” Indeed, The Goddess of 1967 is a poem of moving images punctuated with a discourse on the relationship between man, machine, and nature that is often mysterious, ambiguous and paradoxical. In its fragmented narrative, its collage of natural and man-made imagery and its progression from the real world to a more imagined one, from naturalism to abstraction and internalization, the film offers a snapshot of two displaced young people in turmoil and in crisis. Their yearning for redemption, however unattainable that might be, is only possible in the interstitial space of cultural exchange where their differences become its very articulation. The future of J.M. and B.G. is uncertain for sure, but if there is one, Clara Law suggests, it is contingent upon their supplementality and their ability to reap the promise of transnationalism and postmodern natures.


23 The Goddess of 1967 has garnered the following awards from film festivals: 2000: Silver Hugo Winner (Best Director), Chicago International Film Festival; Golden Lion Nominee, Venice Film Festival; 2001: Golden Key Winner (Best Direction), Art Film Festival, Slovak Republic; FIPRESCI Award Winner, Tromso International Film Festival, Norway.

24 Clara Law’s comments are found in the “Stars Files” of the DVD Chinese version of The Goddess of 1967 released by Universal Laser & Video Co., Ltd., Hong Kong, 2002.

GLOSSARY

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<tr>
<th>Ann Hui</th>
<th>許鞍華</th>
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<tr>
<td>Iwai Shunji</td>
<td>岩井俊二</td>
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<td>Oshi Mamoru</td>
<td>押井守</td>
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<td>Patrick Tam</td>
<td>蔡曉明</td>
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<td>Sai Yoichi</td>
<td>崔洋一</td>
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<td>Stanley Kwan</td>
<td>關錦鵬</td>
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They Say the Moon Is Fuller Here 浮云 (1985, short)
The Other Half and the Other Half 我愛太空人 (1988)
The Reincarnation of Golden Lotus 潘金蓮之前世今生 (1989, or This Day, Previous Life Farewell China 愛在他鄉的季節 (1990)
Fruit Punch, or Fruit Bowl [Yes 藥] (1991)
Autumn Moon 秋月 (1992)
Temptation of a Monk 誘僧 (1993)
The Great Conqueror's Concubine, or King of Western Chu 西楚霸王 (1994, codirected with Stephen Shin)
Wonton Soup 餃子湯 (1994, Segment 4 of Eroticité)
Floating Life 浮生 (1995, cowritten with Eddie Ling-Ching Fong)
Letters to Ali (2004, cowritten with Eddie Ling-Ching Fong)