

The Monster and the Birthday Boy: At the Interface of Korean-Australian Film

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I would like to begin by acknowledging the conference organisers; thank you for your hard work which has ensured that this conference can proceed, and thank you for the hospitality you have shown.

In this paper I will add to the work of my colleagues on this panel and tease out some more of the cultural flows between South Korea and Australia. I come to this conference as a scholar not of Korea or Korean Studies, but of film and media studies. For some years I have been researching international collaborations in media production, and I have a longstanding interest in Australian cinema. For the last four years I have worked at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (the AFTRS), the national film school. My work at the AFTRS has given me new insights into the process of film production and the issues facing filmmakers in Australia and around the world. I started working at the AFTRS in July 2004, just after Park Sejong graduated. His film, *Birthday Boy*, was gathering prizes and plaudits at festivals around the world. The film intrigues me because it is so Korean, and yet it was made in Australia, by students at the national film school. The film sparked my interest in South Korean cinema. I have been fortunate to be able to work with my friend and colleague Brian Yecies to screen Korean films for students at the AFTRS. These courses in Korean cinema opened the eyes of many students to the diversity of Korean cinema. I look forward to seeing how this engagement with Korean screen culture influences these filmmakers' future work.

Since 2000 I have also been involved with a network of cultural organisations and activists from around the world animated by common concern about the impact of the World Trade Organisation agreements and free trade treaties on the cultural sector and on the capacity of states to make cultural policy and intervene in the market in support of cultural diversity. This network, the International Network for Cultural Diversity, was one of the prime movers behind what became the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Through my work with the INCD, I developed an interest in the process and practice of international collaboration in cultural production. I am particularly interested in the textual inflections, cultural resonances and industrial circumstances of collaborative work by filmmakers from different backgrounds.

I would like to talk today about two films, Park Sejong's *Birthday Boy* and Bong Joon-ho's *The Host*, that have been interfaces for me with Korea and Korean Studies. In the engagement with Korea that they offer, these films have helped me to think about filmmaking in Australia in new ways. In my writing and talking about these films I hope also to contribute to the intercultural dialogue that the films make possible.

At some levels both films are profoundly 'Korean'; they are both studies of Korea that are addressed primarily to a Korean audience. The setting, dialogue and ambience of these films are Korean. And yet at the same time as being clearly Korean, they are also fundamentally international in their modes of production, aesthetic styles, and cultural influences. In addition to being interfaces for me with Korea and Korean studies, these films are also interfaces between Korean and Australian filmmakers. Park worked with a team of Australian students to bring his vision to the screen, while Bong employed an Australian company to work on his monster. Both are, in different ways, Australian studies of Korea: *Birthday Boy* is Australian by virtue of its place of production at the AFTRS; and *The Host* was partly visualised and realised by an Australian company, John Cox Creature Workshops, which made the physical – as opposed to digital – model of the monster which was used in several scenes. When analysed in detail, these films have stories to tell not only about Korea and Korean cinema, but also about transnational

cultural flows, filmmaking in Australia and the ways in which film production is being transformed through international collaboration.

Both *Birthday Boy* and *The Host* occupy important if distinct places in their respective national cinemas, but they also clearly exceed national boundaries. In my work in recent years I have been researching the various ways in which the *international* is present in cinema. I have been principally interested in the ways in which film production is increasingly international in its funding, in the stories, locations and settings producers choose, in the cross-cultural and transnational collaboration between individuals and firms during production and post-production, and in the desire for the film to resonate across cultures and speak to audiences around the world (Yecies and Goldsmith forthcoming, Goldsmith forthcoming, Goldsmith and O'Regan 2008, Goldsmith and O'Regan 2005). I am particularly interested in the kind of international collaboration represented by these two films, which help to expand and challenge existing frameworks for thinking about film and the international in screen studies. I want to use these two films to illuminate some of the cultural and industrial connections between South Korea and Australia, and to argue that close study of these films and their circumstances of production within an international frame provide a variety of insights which may be of interest to scholars from a variety of fields of study.

Birthday Boy

Park Sejong's Academy Award nominated animated digital short *Birthday Boy* was made by a small group of postgraduate students under Park's direction at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School between 2001 and early 2004. Because it was made at the AFTRS, it is very much an Australian film. The AFTRS was established by an act of federal parliament in 1973 with a brief to train the filmmakers who would form the Australian new wave, and produce films and programs of high technical and creative merit. It is an Australian Commonwealth government statutory authority, responsible to federal parliament through the Department of Environment, Heritage and the Arts. Unlike the majority of Australian tertiary education institutions, almost all of AFTRS's funding comes directly from the Commonwealth through the federal Arts department (rather than Education, as for universities). And its postgraduate courses are only open to Australian citizens and permanent residents. The films, documentaries, radio and television programs produced at AFTRS are inevitably, indisputably 'Australian'. They are all enrolled to the national project, as the School retains copyright in its productions. AFTRS is subtly but noticeably credited in publicity for *Birthday Boy* and in the film itself; the school's (then) logo of a stylised map of Australia as a strip of twisted celluloid film above the full name of the institution, which appears on the various DVD releases of the film, inscribes the national upon it. *Birthday Boy* is the poster child of Australian national cinema.

And yet other than the nationality of its makers, the film displays none of the markers of 'significant Australian content', the traditional bureaucratic measure of the nationality of an Australian film: none of the words spoken or sung in the song are in English; the film is not set in Australia; nor does the story make any reference to Australia. But it is indisputably an Australian film, because of the circumstances of its production. The fact that it is a digital animation doubly frees *Birthday Boy* from the burden borne by most Australian films to display 'significant Australian content' in overt visual ways. As a digital animation, not only is the 'mechanical resemblance to a referent' that is inevitably present in realist cinema now no longer necessary (Prince 1996 p. 29), but so too are anxieties about Australian content rendered meaningless.

In this world of intense order, we are a long way from realist cinema – the recording of reality with all its contingent possibilities of serendipity and happy accident – that is the

more common mode of Australian film. Despite the fact that *Birthday Boy* employs a style of animation akin to the 'hyper-realism' of Disney films that Paul Wells uses as "the yardstick by which other kinds of animation may be measured for its relative degree of 'realism'" (Wells 1998, p. 25), the film is quantifiably unlike the typical Australian film.

Part of what is exciting about the film from an Australian perspective is that it does not allude to the usual iconography or correspond with the kinds of social and cultural experiences that typically are the stuff of Australian films. It does not allude to local histories of storytelling, or overtly suggest that it can tell us something about what it means to be Australian, and yet it tells us so much about these things by telling a story from, about and set in a different place and culture. As Sung-Ae Lee has argued in a reading of the coverage of the film and its success in Korean language newspapers in Sydney, the film provided the opportunity for the celebration of diasporic achievement and success, for cultural maintenance through its remembering of the Korean War, and for empowerment of the diasporic community (Lee 2004, p.233). At the same time, the allusions to other films, the subtlety of the film's style as expressed through camerawork, editing, sound and music as well as mastery of digital animation techniques and a structure familiar from mainstream Hollywood cinema mark the film as a knowing and learned contribution to international screen culture. It is a film about cultural difference that is also emblematic of cross-cultural connection.

Dynamic and subtle camera moves are a prominent feature of the film. These are of course computer-generated approximations and recreations of camera moves in the endlessly malleable digitally animated space. The movement of the camera within a shot acts to identify the work as digital rather than hand-drawn 2D animation, but the principal purposes are to reinforce the storytelling and enhance mood cues in the film. The first two shots of the film majestically swoop from a close-up of a butterfly on the crown of a roof down over the roof and tracking in to the fuselage of a crashed aeroplane to end facing Manuk who is sorting through the ruins of war. The transition between shots is masked by the film's title, first written onscreen in Hanja (Korean adaptations of Chinese characters), dissolving to 'Birthday Boy' in capital letters, in English, in a slightly stylised typeface. The next shot is a brief overhead which, rising slowly, frames Manuk through a hole in the fuselage as he walks out into the sunlight. (This shot will be repeated in the next sequence as the train passes, and again, heartwrenchingly in the epilogue where along with the dissolves between shots the gradual upward lift of the overhead shot completes our separation from Manuk that had begun when he saw the parcel.) In a long, locked off wide shot we then watch Manuk exit the wreck of the plane and walk towards the camera, the shot ending with a close-up of his face, reinforcing his importance in the story and allowing contemplation of the accomplishment of the animation.

The film uses a naturalistic earthy colour palette, full of greens, browns and rusty reds; like the camerawork the colours are not garish or showy as in many animated films. Their purpose is to set the scene and support the storytelling rather than to stand out and demand attention. Even the sky is yellowish rather than blue or grey. Apart from the wide shot of the train track running off into the mountains, the only natural flora or fauna seen in the film (insect noises are heard throughout) is the butterfly in the opening shot, an unidentified white and orange *peridae*, which is disturbed by a metallic clang. Its flight launches the camera backwards over the wooden roof of a traditional Korean building. In Korean culture the butterfly can symbolise happiness, perhaps an allusion to Manuk's impending happiness at finding the bolt and making the toy, although this may be one of many moments in the film, which invite a cross-cultural reading. The Greek word for 'butterfly' is 'psyche', which also means the soul or the form that a person takes in the after life. The flight of the butterfly here in *Birthday Boy* might then be the flight of

the soul, perhaps the soul of Manuk's soldier father who, we will learn, has recently been killed. Manuk is oblivious.

The film has no dialogue in English, and consequently other aspects of filmmaking must work harder to make the film comprehensible to a non-Korean audience while still remaining convincing as a depiction of Korea and Korean life in 1951 for a Korean audience. We are first introduced to Manuk through sound as the butterfly is disturbed by Manuk's clatter through the debris in the aeroplane in search of a particular piece of metal, before we hear him singing. This is fitting as the sound design and sound editing, along with the score, are critical to the telling and comprehension of the story. In the absence of English dialogue (Manuk's song, his game, the postman's cries and his mother's greeting are all sung or spoken in Korean, with English subtitles), the work that must be done through sound effects, atmospheres and foley is amplified. And it is through sound that we identify and are aligned with Manuk at two critical moments: first, as the train passes Manuk its noise diminishes, leaving only the wind and his heartbeat between the boy and the train; and second, in his war game leading up to the assault on the postman when he talks with his father and we hear the sounds of explosions and gunfire in his head. When he throws the rock/handgrenade, we hear it spiralling to earth, but then it abruptly stops and instead of the anticipated explosion we hear a dull thud followed by the anguished cries of the postman crashing his bicycle. The use of atmospheres is also notable here, particularly the sound of insects, birds and frogs which runs through the film, dropping out only when overpowered by other sounds and in the epilogue when the soundscape is evacuated to leave only the sound of Manuk sleeping, and the wind whistling through the house. The use of the sound of the wind in this final scene gestures back both to the incident with the train, and to the opening scene where the wind whistles through the aeroplane. In the epilogue the wind is made more eerie, ominous and other worldly by the removal of other environmental noises.

Music is used sparingly but effectively in the film. After metallic clangs and rhythm set by the sounds of insects and frogs, the first music in the film is Manuk's song which is heard twice in the setup. The song appears before Manuk, so initially it functions to provide information about character and setting and to alert us that the film's first language is not English. The first instrumental note is not heard until the transition from the setup to the complicating action when a combination of gongs, chimes, bells that are bowed or struck, and plucked string instruments are used to play an apparently arhythmic motif. This motif appears again in variations at the start of the development and again at the beginning of the climax. The eerie strangeness of the music is discomfiting, and raises concern for Manuk's well-being at each spot it appears. Music is used most consistently in the climax. As Manuk discovers the parcel the pattern of short bursts of a single or few notes is broken. A low, drawn out, deep resonating note ominously signals the power of the box's contents, and the music ceases completely in the transition to the epilogue as Manuk marches up and down wearing his father's presents, the boots and dog tags. There is no need for music here to cue the appropriate emotion as we weigh the significance of what we now know, and what Manuk is to young to realize.

The five final shots of the film constitute an epilogue after the climactic scene with the parcel. All separated by dissolves to underscore the poignant bleakness of Manuk and his mother's new situation. The first two shots could be chronologically in sequence but could be moments frozen in time, defined simply by their being *post mortem*. In the first of these shots the camera pans slowly past Manuk's tin toys in the late afternoon sun. New meanings and emotions attach to the toys like the dust dancing in the air. There is a dissolve to a shot of a desk on which sit more of Manuk's tin toys. On a wall above the desk are three photographs of an old man, an elderly couple, and between them a soldier in uniform. The final three shots of the film are all overhead (or God's-eye) shots of

Manuk asleep on the floor, each almost imperceptibly rising up, away from the boy. The film ends at the moment the mother arrives home, thus delaying indefinitely her discovery of the contents of the parcel. The film ends then on the cusp of her and Manuk's new life, before she realises what has happened, but at the point at which we realise we know more than all of the characters about the story.

The editing and framing of these shots amplify the pitiful scene (particularly in the shots of Manuk asleep on the floor just before his mother arrives). They function as breathing spaces, moments for the audience to contemplate what they have just experienced. The use of dissolves to transition between these shots is, apart from an almost imperceptible dissolve between the first and second shots of the film, the only overt intervention of editing style in the film. The rest of the film has been edited in continuity style for clarity and comprehension, although there are several sophisticated sequences of cuts which while probably unnoticed by most audiences are fundamental to the telling of the story, as well as to cueing the mood, and giving balance to the film. One vital example is the moment when Manuk first sees the parcel. From an angle that later transpires to be the position of the box, we watch Manuk arrive home. Suddenly his head whips around so that he is looking directly at the camera, there is an axial cut to a close up of his face as he looks back at us. But instead of directly cutting to the reverse angle and showing what Manuk is looking at, as is the convention with this looking/looked at transition, another shot is inserted from a new angle: wide and behind Manuk, so we see him kick off his boots and clamber up on to the verandah from behind, before he scurries over to the object of his attention. It is only at this point that we see what he is looking at, from his point of view: the box with incomprehensible (to him and a non-Korean speaking audience) writing on it. The insertion of the extra shot delays the satisfaction of our desire to see what has captured his attention so totally, and also performs the important work of separating us from Manuk and preparing us to deduce as onlookers and not as Manuk (to whom we have established quite an attachment) what the meaning of the parcel really is.

The story was provoked by Park's observations of cultural specificity and difference between his homeland and his new country. Park, who had migrated after falling in love with an Australian woman, was struck by the way birthdays are celebrated:

Since I move to Australia I was looking at a lot of Western culture, like for Christmas and birthdays they get a lot of material things, but in Korea when I was growing up, even still now these days, the present really is not that important for birthday. I think I must say this thing. In Korea we have seaweed soup on our birthday. Normally the seaweed soup is for pregnant woman - after somebody who has had baby, they eat seaweed soup all the time for six months to relieve pain. So having seaweed soup on our birthday is thinking of our mother's *pain*. It's not just 'because I'm great' or 'I deserve this present'. (Sejong Park, quoted in Rankin 2005, p. 3)

The title of the film is ironic, and deliberately manipulates (non-Korean) assumptions about the significance of the rituals and ceremonies associated with birthdays. In this playful way the film acknowledges itself as an expression or mediator of cultural diversity – all while subtly engaging its audiences in intercultural dialogue, and encouraging reflection on cultural values and rituals that are often taken for granted.

Birthday Boy won the first of many prizes at festivals around the world within weeks of completion in early 2004. An early and important success was the award of Best Animated Short at the prestigious ACM SIGGRAPH (Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques) Computer Animation Festival. The win qualified *Birthday Boy* for the 2005 Academy Awards. Its

director and creative team had not yet graduated from the AFTRS. The conference website later reported the jury's glowing response to the film:

The Jury awarded Best Animated Short to "Birthday Boy" because of its captivating and expert storytelling and filmmaking. According to the jury, it is a phenomenal film on its merits alone, but even more impressive given that Park is still a student. Every camera angle and motion transcends the screen and transports the viewer into Manuk's world to experience life as he knows it. (ACM SIGGRAPH 2004)

The nomination for an Academy Award capped an astonishing run of festival success. *Birthday Boy* has to date been screened at over 100 film festivals around the world, and it has won over 40 prizes. It is the most successful film in the almost forty year history of the AFTRS.

Birthday Boy is clearly a diasporic film because it is a story about South Korea that was written, directed and animated by a Korean-Australian, and made outside Korea. While the film exhibits some of the components of diasporic filmmaking as defined by Hamid Naficy (2001), it also exceeds this analytical framework. In common with the exilic and diasporic filmmaking that Naficy examines, *Birthday Boy* could be described as exhibiting a 'nostalgic longing' (Naficy 2001, p.5) for a place, the homeland, through its historical and geographical setting. At the start of the film, an on-screen title in English situates the storyworld in 'Korea, 1951'. Rather than a specific place *in* Korea, the title sets the film in an imagined, historical 'Korea' that is neither North, nor South, but both at the same time. The film is a 'cinematic chronotope' (a term Naficy appropriates from Russian cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin) in that considerable meaning is invested in the time and place in which the action occurs. Naficy observes that '[o]ne typical media response to the rupture of displacement is to create a utopian prelapsarian chronotope of the homeland that is uncontaminated by contemporary facts' (p.152). Manuk's youth and unknowing joy in his surroundings might be considered to be 'prelapsarian', that is representing an innocence since lost, but his home is far from utopian even though Manuk might believe he has everything he needs. The war is ever-present, and can hardly be considered a utopian force. And although the film is set in the past, the time and events it evokes are implicit in so many 'contemporary facts' about Korea.

Birthday Boy is also 'interstitial' in the manner in which Naficy (2001 p.4) defines a diasporic film as '[l]ocated at the intersection of aesthetic systems, languages, nations, practices, cultures' (2001 p.291) – between times and places, between home (Korea) and host (Australia) cultures and cinemas. This aspect is not overtly represented in the film, but rather becomes evident gradually as the film unfolds, and in particular at the moment the audience realises the true meaning of the 'present'. The significance of correspondence to the narrative marks *Birthday Boy* as a kind of epistle-film, another type of film typically made by diasporic or exiled filmmakers, in which letters and other forms of human communication across distance can represent a desire for another place and time (Naficy 2001 p.101). Despite these apparent similarities to the style of diasporic filmmaking analysed by Naficy, the diasporic subject is evoked rather than directly depicted or addressed in *Birthday Boy*. The film was celebrated in Korean-language newspapers in Australia as an example of diasporic achievement and success, which empowered the Korean-Australian community. Park was also praised for the contribution the film makes to cultural maintenance for diasporic Koreans in its remembrance (rather than celebration) of the war (Lee 2004, p.233). Lee observes:

This collaboration of Australian and Korean creative expertise, a film made in Australia about the Korean War and voiced by a Korean-Australian child who had to be coached in Korean language, redefines the parameters of geography, national

identity, and belonging, and, as a result, its foregrounding in the *Sydney Korean Herald* is a significant cultural moment. (Lee 2004, p.242)

For an Australian audience, *Birthday Boy* is 'accented' in the sense that it sounds unlike other Australian films: the film's dialogue is spoken and sung only in Korean, and sound design and score digitally reproduce Korean atmospheres and instruments. Sound design and music are, like the animation, 'interstitial' in the sense of being located between cultures. In the absence of English dialogue (Manuk's song, his game, the postman's cries and his mother's greeting are all sung or spoken in Korean, with English subtitles), the work that must be done through sound effects, atmospheres and foley to create the storyworld and enable transnational audiences to understand and be moved by the story, is amplified. The film is a journey of homecoming, both narratively for the little boy Manuk and metaphorically for the diasporic filmmaker, Park. The absence of both parents (at least until the final frames of the film), which Naficy terms 'structured absences' could be seen to be indicative of the absence that shadows the diasporic subject: the loss of home and homeland, although the absent parent is also common to both Australian and Korean cinema.

Birthday Boy is a significant contribution to Australian, Korean and international screen culture. As well as thinking about *Birthday Boy* as 'an Australian film', or 'a diasporic film', however, it is important to think about the film *as a film*. *Birthday Boy* shares a narrative structure with Hollywood films studied by Kristin Thompson (Thompson 1999). A number of films and filmmakers are evoked or quoted in the film. The scene with the postman to me clearly references the films of French director Jacques Tati, in particular his short film *L'École des Facteurs* (1947) and the feature films *Jour de Fête* (1948) and *Mon Oncle* (1954). These scenes are not only examples of the intercultural dialogue opened by *Birthday Boy*, they also acknowledge its cinematic heritage. The film clearly speaks to broader audiences than the diasporic Korean community. In its allusions to other films, in the subtlety of its 'camerawork', editing, sound and music as well as its use of digital animation, and its narrative structure familiar from mainstream Hollywood cinema (Thompson 1999), the film is a knowing and learned contribution to international screen culture. In particular the references to the work of French director and comedian Jacques Tati (the comic scene with the postman is reminiscent of Tati's short film *L'École des Facteurs*, 1947, and the features *Jour de Fête*, 1948, and *Mon Oncle* 1954) are not simply further exemplification of the intercultural concerns that underpin the film. They also work to position the film in dialogue with the international history of film. Serge Daney once declared that "Every Tati film marks simultaneously a moment in the work of Jacques Tati; a moment in the history of French society and French cinema; a moment in film history" (quoted in Rosenbaum nd). The allusions to Tati's films in *Birthday Boy* are also 'moments in film history'.

Park's experience with the reception of the film further complicates the film's and his own hybrid positioning further. Not only is the film comprehensible as both diasporic and Australian, it is possible to consider it in terms of the transnational, understood as an 'arena connecting differences' in which 'a variety of regional, national, and local specificities impact upon each other in various types of relationships ranging from synergy to contest' (Berry and Farquhar 2006, p. 5). To that list, we might also add 'diasporic'. Park is a member of the Korean diaspora, and the film is a diasporic film, while his crew are members of a more intangible diaspora in Australia: the diaspora of transnational filmmakers. We understand transnational filmmakers to mean those whose work is principally intended for an overseas audience or intended to travel across borders and cultures. It is transnational rather than 'international' because it does not necessarily involve nation-states as 'corporate actors' (Hannerz 1996, p.6). It is in the arena of the transnational that we can relate the Korean-Australian film work discussed

above, to the work of Australian post-production, digital and visual effects companies on Korean feature films.

The Host

In the time I have left I would like to turn briefly to the second film, Bong Joon-ho's monster movie *The Host*, to highlight rather different forms of collaboration between Australian and South Korean filmmakers that have further extended my thinking about international audiovisual production and filmmaking in Australia.

Over the last ten years, projects involving Australian and South Korean filmmakers have been most important in first pioneering and then growing the flow of film work from Asia into Australia. Projects from China have also been important from high profile collaborations such as Animal Logic's work on *Hero* to children's television co-productions, and in the last couple of years, Indian films and filmmakers working in Australia have perhaps had the highest profile but historically, over the last decade, it is relations with Korea that have opened new possibilities for Australian filmmakers across the industry. Connections with Korea have transformed understanding of what an Australian film can be. This is most obviously the case with *Birthday Boy*. Other possibilities for filmmaking in Australia emerge through consideration of the range of services provided to Korean filmmakers by Australian firms over the last decade. Study of this work, which Brian Yecies and I have only begun (Yecies and Goldsmith forthcoming) indicates amongst other things the depth of the international market for cultural services.

The Host is an example of what a colleague of mine, Susan Ward, describes as 'the localised international' film. Influences are drawn from Japanese and American cinema to produce an indigenised, Korean-ised monster movie, made by an international team. Through much of the film, the monster is a digital creation, the work of animators and visual effects artists working for companies in New Zealand (WETA) and the United States (The Orphanage). The Australian contribution to the film was limited to the fabrication of the physical monster. Physical interaction on set between the actors and a model of the monster was minimised, but several scenes demanded the use of a physical rather than digital monster. Director Bong and Jang Hee-cheol designed the monster, with the models built to their instructions by the Australian company, John Cox's Creature Workshop. The Australian company were in a service relationship with Bong and the Korean production company, sub-contractors enrolled to the project. Looked at in this way, the film might be considered to be exemplary of a trend in film and television production over the last few years towards greater international collaboration on production. I have tracked this trend in my work with Tom O'Regan on English-language cinema (Goldsmith and O'Regan 2005, 2008). *The Host* is important in the context of this work because it illustrates that the trend is not restricted to English-language production, but rather is becoming more and more common in film industries around the world. Bong's decision to involve firms outside South Korea was not part of an arrangement to meet the terms of an international treaty such as a co-production agreement that requires a certain amount of production to take place in each country. It was a commercial and creative decision taken following extensive research into genre cinema and the capabilities of companies around the world to perform the work to the desired standard ('Dream Comes True').

It is clear from the English-language interviews and press commentary about the film that Bong was from the beginning of the creative process seeking a look for *The Host* that would be new in Korean film. Bong was also driven by the awareness that unconvincing special effects can make a film laughable and destroy the drama, and so he sought out experts in their trade regardless of their nationality.

Realism is the dominant mode in contemporary Australian cinema, as I mentioned briefly in relation to *Birthday Boy*. South Korean cinema appears to me to be more varied and tells more genre-based stories than Australian cinema. In Australian cinema science-fiction and fantasy films are rare, and few films make extensive use of physical special effects. More Australian films are using digital visual effects, although often in invisible rather than spectacular ways. John Cox's Creature Workshops are acknowledged as international experts in their field, but their work on Australian films has limited despite the Academy Award that the company won for their work on *Babe* (1995). The opportunity to work on a film like *The Host* permits the company to maintain its Australian base, expand its repertoire and advertise its services to clients in new markets across Asia.

After *The Host*, John Cox's Creature Workshop made a monster crocodile for the Australian horror film *Rogue*. This work was only possible because of the size of the film's budget, which was very high for an Australian film. Even in a monster movie such as this though Australian filmmakers typically reach for referents from the real world rather than from fantasy. This is indicative of some of the issues that John Cox and his team face in working with Australian filmmakers, and indicative of the limited use of the talents of the firm in Australian cinema.

Until 2007, this kind of service work was almost invisible in Australia. It was only last year that the work of what is termed the 'PDV' or Post-production, Digital and Visual Effects sector of the industry in Australia was included in the annual report made by the Australian Film Commission about production activity in Australia. Previously this type of work was unremarked and largely ignored by the official institutions of cinema in Australia. As the importance of international work has become evident to all involved in the industry in recent years, the value of this work – culturally, financially, and industrially – is better recognised.

Conclusion

Analysis of *Birthday Boy* and *The Host* expands our understandings of the production, circulation and resonances of international films, and showcases the long-term transnational flows and cultural exchange between Australian and Korean filmmakers and film industries. I have outlined some of the ways in which both films help me to rethink what Australian cinema and filmmaking in Australia mean in the twenty-first century. Both films help to expand and challenge our existing frameworks for thinking about the film and the international. Onscreen they appear identifiably Korean, but offscreen they are international projects with cultural and industrial resonances that go beyond the Korean peninsula. Both films are shared cultural expressions and sites of cultural interaction and dialogue. And both are examples of the openness to other cultures that film can facilitate. They are, in short, interfaces between cultures, between filmmakers, and between Korean studies and the world.

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