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# Introduction: The film phenomenon and how risk pervades it

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**Introduction to *Film and Risk*, ed. Mette Hjort (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, forthcoming)**

### **The Film Phenomenon and How Risk Pervades It**

Mette Hjort

The language of risk is common coin these days, informing virtually all areas of our lives. Parent/teacher discussions, whether in Asia or the West, make reference to learner profiles, and these often include the idea of being a “risk-taker.” Thus, for example, a child may be encouraged proudly to report that the recent class excursion with Outward Bound allowed her to meet one of her learning targets, which is to become “more of a risk-taker.” Discourses related to health, whether journalistic or medical, draw attention to long-term risks accompanying life-style choices. Phenomena such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), climate change, and the most recent financial meltdown all offer opportunities to reflect on the extent to which life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is shaped by global risks, by the threat of different kinds of harm, some of them with remote originating causes. The ease with which many of us “speak” the language of risk is itself an indication of the extent to which highly sophisticated studies of risk, by economists, sociologists, medical professionals, among many others, have been absorbed into the language of everyday life.

That risk should be a pervasive feature of contemporary life is anything but surprising. As Peter L. Bernstein argues persuasively, in his intriguing study entitled *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk*, “The revolutionary idea that defines the boundary between modern times and the past is the mastery of risk: the notion that the future is more than a whim of the gods and that men and women are not passive before

nature. Until human beings discovered a way across that boundary, the future was a mirror of the past or the murky domain of oracles and soothsayers who held a monopoly over knowledge of anticipated events.”<sup>i</sup> Bernstein’s is a fascinating story about the thinkers, many of them passionate gamblers, who showed “the world how to understand risk, measure it, and weigh its consequences.”<sup>ii</sup> While Bernstein sees the “Hindu-Arabic numbering system that reached the West seven to eight hundred years ago” as having facilitated probabilistic reasoning about the future, he sees the “serious study of risk” as beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in connection with two French thinkers’ mathematical study of “a seventeenth-century version of the game of Trivial Pursuit.”<sup>iii</sup> Blaise Pascal and Pierre de Fermat’s findings, claims Bernstein, “led to the discovery of the theory of probability” and this in turn made possible “the capacity to manage risk, and with it the appetite to take risk and make forward-looking choices”, that is, the very “energy that drives the economic system forward.”<sup>iv</sup> According to Bernstein, the ability to think in terms of risk, and the inclination to do so, are, quite simply, defining features of modernity. And while modernity is now often held to be a plural phenomenon, admitting of different types and paths,<sup>v</sup> Bernstein’s view that probabilistic reasoning about possible damage or harm pervades contemporary life is difficult to dispute. The global risk-focused debates prompted by the collapse of the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference clearly suggest the extent to which the language of risk is a lingua franca that is understood all around the world.

What is striking is that while the study of risk has become a veritable industry over the last few decades, film scholars have had very little to say about the topic. Yet, risk has not been entirely ignored by film scholars either, for many of them do gesture

towards risk, or make passing reference to it. For example, in her book on the re-make phenomenon, entitled *Encore Hollywood: Remaking French Cinema*, Lucy Mazdon points to risk management, or risk aversion, as a possible way of understanding the remake strategy.<sup>vi</sup> And in his chapter entitled “Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances”, Murray Smith suggests that when we experience pleasure as a result of engaging with such characters as Hannibal Lecter (*Silence of the Lambs*, dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991), we do so in part because we are afforded the opportunity to explore “the extremes of possible or conceivable experience that we lack the opportunity or *courage* (emphasis added) to experience in reality.”<sup>vii</sup> Drawing on Greg Currie to weigh the advantage of imagination over actual experience, Berys Gaut chooses to foreground risk, and the related questions of courage and danger:

The great advantage of imagination over experience is that it is relatively costless: I could discover that I am brave through undergoing some terrible misfortune, which I rise above, but it would be better not to have to suffer. “Imagination trades reliability for risk ...” as Currie notes. Yet the lesser epistemic authority of imagination compared to experience should not be exaggerated. In choosing between a medical and a philosophy career, for instance, I cannot experience both in full, for I cannot live the rest of my life twice over, once entirely as a doctor, once entirely as a philosopher. However, I can imagine the rest of my life spent entirely as a doctor and can also imagine the rest of my life spent entirely as a philosopher. So there are some epistemic respects in which imagination is superior to experience. And a motivation actually to put myself in danger merely

to find out whether I really am courageous calls into question whether I really am courageous, as opposed to reckless, even when I do not flinch from danger.<sup>viii</sup>

Inasmuch as cinematic fictions offer viewers an opportunity to engage in make belief they may well bring epistemic gains, and this without the costs involved in actually engaging in risky behavior. In *Chávez: The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: A Case Study of Politics and the Media*, Rod Stoneman returns to the issue of risk on several occasions, but without making it the focus of his discussion. Thus, for example, he refers critically to the now dominant preferences for a “convenient, comfortable production base which eliminates much of the risk, unpredictability and danger of commissioning from small independents.”<sup>ix</sup> Evoking the role played by “the recreation of a national film agency in Ireland in 1993, Stoneman praises the Film Board for consistently taking “risks with new directors”, encouraging “them to transcend any residual insularity in relation to subjects and ideas.”<sup>x</sup>

As is the case with most generalizations, the one that I have articulated here, which concerns film scholars’ tendency to make only passing reference to risk, if at all, does have its exceptions. Not surprisingly, the exceptions occur in the area of economic approaches to film, economics being the discipline, as Bernstein rightly indicates, that pioneered thinking about risk. John Sedgwick and Mike Pokorny have, for example, co-authored a number of fine, empirically-based articles over the years, focusing on the ways in which filmmaking is caught up with economic risk. An early, oft-cited article of theirs is “The Risk Environment of Film-Making: Warner in the Inter-War Period.”<sup>xi</sup>

My point is that *Film and Risk* is a response to what I see as a lacuna that is best thought of as an opportunity to engage in concept development and to propose some new

ways of thinking about film that are a matter of articulating some of the pre-theoretical intuitions with which film scholars appear to be working. It is quite simply the case that for the most part risk is overlooked in connection with the study of film. At the same time, many of those who write on film do seem to be working with intuitions about how various forms of risk-taking shape aspects of the filmmaking or film viewing process, and this in non-trivial ways. It is my firm conviction that risk is absolutely central to film, and that various conceptual approaches to risk, as well as different types of risk, warrant serious study by film scholars. At this point, cinephiles, students, and scholars have at their disposal any number of very fine handbooks that usefully articulate the key concepts and terms of the still young discipline of Film Studies. Examples include Susan Hayward's *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*<sup>xii</sup> and *Media & Film Studies Handbook*, by Vivienne Clark, Peter Jones, Bill Malyszko, and David Wharton.<sup>xiii</sup> Unsurprisingly, given my argument thus far, these handbooks do not include entries on risk. Susan Hayward does, however, "welcome suggestions for further entries from readers", with reference to a possible revised later edition.<sup>xiv</sup> *Film and Risk* is a collectively undertaken attempt to show that paying attention to risk in the context of film is well worth the effort. It is my hope that the volume will make this point, in such detail and so persuasively, that in future the term "risk" will become a well established conceptual resource, one readily available to anyone with an interest in how films come into being and make their way into our lives.

In what follows I aim, in as straightforward a way as possible, to motivate the reader's interest in the topic of film and risk, to give the reader a sense of how the volume is organized, and, very importantly, a clear understanding of the research questions to

which it is a response. Instead of reviewing the theoretical literature on risk, the introduction focuses on what I see as thought-provoking, real-world examples of how risk pervades the phenomenon of film. The task of defining the term “risk”, and of situating a preferred definition in relation to competing approaches to risk, is thus taken up, not in the introduction, but on an “as-need” basis in the various chapters. Instead of concluding with the once obligatory synopses section, this introduction identifies the central research questions to which *Film and Risk* provides a response, organized into broad categories, and keyed to specific contributors.

One of the advantages of this very direct approach, which eschews meta-theoretical commentary, among other things, is that students, at various stages of their studies, can be drawn into the conversation that the edited volume is meant to foster. Having taught English-language writings on film in contexts where students are non-native speakers of English, and this for half a decade in Scandinavia and a full decade in Asia, I am increasingly interested in articulating research questions and results in as communicatively inclusive a way as possible. But my interest in inclusiveness is by no means motivated by pedagogical concerns alone, by the strong desire to see capable and highly motivated students with fluency in languages other than English (some of them significantly harder to master than English) able to engage more easily with the issues that are central to Film Studies today. Inclusiveness is also about trying to create the conditions for the kind of interdisciplinary discussion that is likely to be necessary if we are to make progress on some of these very issues. If, for example, we are to bring colleagues from Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, and Philosophy into our debates about film--which indeed we must if we are genuinely to understand risk and its place in

the world of film—then the reasons for embarking on a project on film and risk have to be as clear as possible. Conversations spanning the theory/practice divide are also likely to be fruitful if we wish to grasp the ways in which filmmaking is informed by thinking about risk. And in my experience such conversations are best facilitated, not by careful and detailed historical, theoretical, or interpretive discursive moves, but by succinct accounts of the *issues* that are deemed to be key, and by telling anecdotes or specific cases that highlight the ways in which these issues are genuinely a matter of shared interest, to both scholars and practitioners.

In what follows, then, I take up four specific tasks. I seek: 1) to make a case for seeing research on risk as central to Film Studies; 2) to articulate the methodological principles governing the volume's conception, and thereby its underlying aims; 3) to articulate the research questions to which *Film and Risk* provides the beginnings of answers; 4) to suggest reasons why the study of risk is capacious, in the sense of capable of accommodating a wide range of methodological and theoretical commitments, and a broad spectrum of interests. The aim is to accomplish these tasks in a way that will motivate cinephiles, scholars, students, film practitioners, policy makers, and institution builders, and many other readers, to begin to engage with the thought provoking contributions that *Film and Risk* encompasses.

#### *Why Risk is Key: Some Telling Cases*

Each of the chapters in *Film and Risk* evokes a significant number of empirical cases that illustrate the particular type or aspect of cinematic risk under discussion. The point, then,



of the following examples is not to identify the full range of film's involvement with risk, for it is the task of the book as a whole to do this. Rather, the aim is simply to show that risk arises in many of the different areas that tend to be thought of as central to Film Studies. The idea is to encourage readers to recall the no doubt numerous cases that are known to them, of the phenomenon of film being infused with risk. The examples canvassed here serve to suggest that our understanding of film can only be deepened, and this in genuinely rewarding ways, by taking risk seriously.

### *Screen Acting*

On March 8, 1935, International Women's Day, Chinese actress Ruan Lingyu killed herself, at the age of 25, prompting an outpouring of grief, not only in Shanghai, where she was based, or in China, but around the world. Indeed, according to Kristine Harris, Ruan's funeral procession drew over 100,000 mourners.<sup>xv</sup> Why did Ruan, at the height of her career at the time, kill herself?<sup>xvi</sup> This question, scholars generally agree, is one to which it is possible to give a more than plausible response. And the answer points directly to risks related to the activity of screen acting in China in the 1930s, and to risks linked to a particular approach to acting. Writing on movie actresses and public discourse in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s, Michael Chang argues persuasively that the classificatory system used to categorize courtesans and prostitutes during the late Qing dynasty and early Republican years informed the public's understanding of the actress' profession. To the extent that actresses escaped opprobrium, Chang argues, they did so not because they acted well, but because they 'act[ed] good and act[ed] like "themselves"'<sup>xvii</sup> The narrative of Ruan's personal life is fairly intricate and cannot be

fully explored here. Suffice it to say that her personal life did not meet the standards of goodness that Chang sees as potentially exempting actresses from censure during the early Republican period. Indeed, Ruan was the object of considerable notoriety in the tabloid press, as a result of vicious charges laid against her and her lover, Tang Jishan, by her common law husband, Zhang Damin. Journalists writing for the tabloids were particularly happy to capitalize on the details of her personal life because of her role in Cai Chusheng's film entitled *New Woman* (1934). Unable to censor Cai's film, which drew on a real-life suicide case to present a highly critical picture of the press's rumor-mongering, the journalists appear to have conspired with Zhang to attack Ruan and Tang publicly.

In addition to incurring risks quite simply by virtue of pursuing a career as a screen actress while refusing restrictive standards of authentic goodness, Ruan courted risk because she tended to re-live such tragic experiences as her own suicide attempts through roles that involved similar actions, and to be generally consumed by the roles she played. Bérénice Reynaud puts the point as follows:

Ruan—who started her film career as a teenager to avoid the abuse and humiliation of her situation as a maidservant's daughter—did not 'act', but really experienced the feelings she projected on screen. Hence the unaffected charge, poignancy and feistiness of performance—unable to separate acting from reality, she was consumed by the tragic dimension of her roles.<sup>xviii</sup>

Shu Kei, a well-known Hong Kong filmmaker and dean at the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, sees a direct connection between Ruan's tragic fate and the tragic roles that she played:

She was imprisoned twice. In other films she suffered from melancholy or madness; in one [film] she was assassinated and in another she died of illness. My sense is that every time she played these tragic scenes, she experienced a series of emotional shocks, and very often she proved incapable of drawing a distinction between the film and reality. <sup>xix</sup>

Shu Kei's line of reasoning finds support in observations made by Ruan's fellow actress, Li Lili. On set during the shooting of a key scene in *New Woman*, Li later provided the following description of Ruan's performance as Wei Ming, the real-life actress who committed suicide on account of the tabloid's efforts to blacken her reputation:

... she went very silent for a while and quickly went into character: tears started to fall from her eyes, and while she was crying she took the sleeping pills. What appeared on the screen was a close-up of her face: she didn't show much expression, she just gazed as she swallowed one pill after another. However, the look in her eyes underwent a subtle change, showing all the contradictory emotions of a suicide at the moment when her life hangs in the balance, and expressing her thirst for life and dread of death, her indignation and her sorrow .. she couldn't stop crying for most of the day. <sup>xx</sup>

At the time, Ruan had herself attempted suicide more than once, and it is generally assumed that her extreme response to the shooting of the relevant scene supports the idea that the boundary between her life and her roles was highly unstable and at times barely present at all, at least subjectively.

Risk, it would appear, is an unavoidable subject for discussion, if we are to understand Ruan and the contributions she made as one of Chinese cinema's finest

actresses. And Ruan is by no means a singular case. What is more, even the most superficial interest in the history of screen acting quickly brings to light many other ways in which risk—as deliberate risk taking, as an unknowing exposure of the self to possible harm, and as a way of acting that straddles that very boundary--affects the agency of actors. In Hong Kong, for example, actors work in an environment that is closely associated with the triads, making it difficult, I discovered, to get them openly to discuss the question of film and its relation to risk. Actors, whether from Hong Kong or elsewhere, may run the risk of being mistaken for the characters they play, as Paprika Steen discovered when her flight to her holiday destination suddenly involved reassuring a young fellow passenger that she was not in fact an alien. Having seen Ole Bornedal's *Vikaren (The Substitute, 2007)*, that young passenger “knew” Steen to be the alien school teacher, Ulla Harms, and felt an urgent need to inform all other passengers of this fact, thereby reiterating in real life the very structure of the film's narrative: in the film the children are onto Harms' true nature, whereas the adults are taken in by her pretense at being human. Reporting on Gabourey Sidibe's award-winning film debut in *Precious* (dir. Lee Daniels, 2009), Stuart Jeffries focuses on “one problem. Sidibe keeps getting mistaken for the girl she plays.” And that girl is “functionally illiterate”, has “been repeatedly raped by her father”, and has “two children as a result of her father's abuse, one of them a baby with Down's syndrome who has been taken into care.”<sup>xxi</sup> One of the risks of acting, clearly, is the conflation of the person and the role, but there are many others. Jackie Chan, with his trademark out-takes, also comes to mind in connection with acting and risk,<sup>xxii</sup> as does Michelle Yeoh, whose star status similarly rests on her ability to carry out her own stunt work. In their very insistence on doing their own stunt work we

find an implicit reference to some central, but insufficiently studied, practices of risk-taking in film: those of the stunt women and men who themselves take serious risks so that others can opt out of risk work. Sylvia Martin has much to say about this topic, in her chapter entitled “Stunt Workers and Spectacle: Ethnography of Physical Risk in Hollywood and Hong Kong,” and there is thus no need to say more about the issue here. Let me, instead, move on to some quite different examples of how risk shapes phenomena that are generally assumed to be central to Film Studies.

### *Film Style*

A concept of style has been a core element in the analysis of film, from the earliest attempts to think systematically about the cinematic medium’s specificity and unique contributions, as compared with rival arts, such as the theater. In *On the History of Film Style*, David Bordwell provides a helpful definition of style:

I take style to be a film’s systematic and significant use of techniques of the medium. Those techniques fall into broad domains: *mise en scène* [...]; framing, focus, control of color values, and other aspects of cinematography; editing; and sound. Style is minimally the texture of the film’s images and sounds, the result of choices made by the filmmaker(s) in particular historical circumstances. ... [Style may also involve] other properties, such as narrative strategies or favored subjects or themes.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The concept of style can be thought of as encompassing, among other things, choices reflected within a given film, across a number of films, within a single practitioner’s oeuvre or across the oeuvres of practitioners who are deemed to have something in

common--the circumstances under which they work, for example, or their commitment to certain values. In an attempt to capture some of the possible scope of the stylistic analysis of film, and the role that concepts of risk might play in such analyses, I would like to provide two examples of risk determining cinematic style.

In an interview-based article focusing on the work of film editor Adam Nielsen, Lars Movin discusses the principles governing the use of music in Eva Mulvad and Anja Al-Erhayem's award-winning documentary entitled *Vores lykkes fjender* (*Enemies of Happiness*, 2006). The film follows then 27-year-old Malali Joya's courageous role in the parliamentary elections in Afghanistan in 2005, after having challenged the Grand Council of tribal elders in 2003, on the grounds of corruption. The film focuses on Joya's campaign for election, at a time when her life is constantly at risk.<sup>xxiv</sup> Movin points out that music is introduced early on in the film, signaling a departure from "a cinéma vérité-style minimalism to a more expressive formal language."<sup>xxv</sup> In response to a question regarding the film's sound/image relations, Nielsen explains his choices as follows:

In the case of *Enemies of Happiness* the challenge we faced was that the life of the main character was constantly being threatened, but it was difficult to show this by means of images only. She lived on one side of the street, and worked on the other, and to enable her to walk from the one place to the other, the entire street was blocked off. But the takes just showed some guards. It didn't look especially dangerous. So we felt that we needed to assist the viewer's understanding a bit. How do you show something that you can't really see? Here music can be a good tool.<sup>xxvi</sup>

A stylistic analysis of *Enemies of Happiness* would likely involve noting the nature of the music that is heard in the film, the frequency of its use, and the kind of images that it accompanies. Inasmuch as stylistic features arising from sound/image relations involving extra-diegetic music are very much a matter of deliberate choices, practitioner's agency, explored through an in-depth practitioner's interview, helps to deepen the stylistic analysis. In this case what is brought to light as a result of taking a practitioner's intentions and reflective awareness of his practices seriously is the extent to which sound-image relations are shaped by a perceived need to ensure that the viewer understands the film as being to a significant extent *about* risk-taking, and thus *about* courage. What makes the film's story tell-able is that it centers on a young woman who knowingly risks her life, again and again, for the sake of significant social and political change in Afghanistan.

My second example of how cinematic style may be shaped by some aspect of the phenomenon of risk brings a concept of collective style into play.<sup>xxvii</sup> I have in mind here a number of films that were made in Lebanon in the 1980's, during the civil war, and that are marked, stylistically, by the circumstances under which they were produced. In "Cinema in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Kuwait," Kiki Kennedy-Day draws a broad distinction between visually successful and visually unsuccessful films produced in Lebanon in the 1980s, with war-based, and thus risk-based, stylistic markers as a defining feature of the former:

Those films that incorporated the war and worked with its unpredictable outcomes were the most visually successful. In them the failures of production (for example, the bursting shells seen through the living-room windows in *Ghazal al-Banat 2*)

are merely read as part of the plot. If the lights go out, it is simply what is expected to happen in times of war. It was not possible in war-torn Beirut to make highly polished films, but that lack of polish became part of the success of films like *Hurub Saghira* or *Ghazal al-Banat 2*.<sup>xxviii</sup>

To understand the salient formal and thematic regularities that define the category of films to which *Hurub Saghira* or *Ghazal al-Banat 2* belong, and to do this in stylistic terms, it is necessary to grasp the filmmakers' decision-making within a context that, while constrained by war, nonetheless offered certain choices. The decision to incorporate the uncertainties of war into the films, and thereby to transform the impossibility of polish into the basis for creativity and innovation, is a stylistic choice. Inasmuch as the choice in question appears to inform, not just one work, but a series of works, it is the basis for something like a group style. To make sense of that style it is necessary to grasp the circumstances of the films' production, and especially the filmmakers' decision to revise the definition of what counts as a successful film in light of the inevitable risks associated with the ongoing war. Without a concept of risk—and thus of uncertainty, probability, and danger or harm—it is possible simply to *describe* the films' recurring and salient features, in a purely formal way, but it is not possible genuinely to *explain* them. Stylistic explanations become possible once practitioner's agency is brought into the analysis, and thereby the filmmakers' reasoning about uncertainty, probability, and danger or harm, that is, about risk.

As will become evident, several of the chapters in *Film and Risk* take up the issue of risk in stylistic terms. In “Accented Film-making and Risk-taking in the Age of Postcolonial Militancy, Terrorism, Globalization, Wars, Oppression, and Occupation,”



for example, Hamid Naficy looks at a range of cases that in many ways resemble the Lebanese situation described above. And in “Flamboyant Risk-taking” Mette Hjort focuses on the reasons filmmakers might have for trading favorable risk positions for unfavorable ones, and for systematically drawing attention to their risk-taking; to the point where the expression of risk by various means becomes a guiding principle and a stylistic marker, relative in the first instance to a given work, but finally also in relation to the entire category of works that share the relevant traits.

*Film's Institutions, Broadly Construed*

Films are made and seen in contexts that are structured by policies, laws, regulations, and the activities of individuals working for a wide range of film bodies and film institutions. Film, that is, has an institutional existence, and here too we will find that thinking about risk is crucial. To illustrate this point, I shall refer to seven quite different examples. My first example takes us once again to Afghanistan, this time in connection with the extraordinary actions of Khwaja Ahmadshah, who, in 1996, following a Taliban decree that made moving pictures a matter of heresy and called for their destruction, rescued a significant number of Afghan productions. When the decree was announced, Afghan Film, “the Kabul-based organization that both promoted Afghan cinema and housed the Asian republic’s entire film and TV archive” had 120 employees on staff. In response to the decree, 118 of these employees fled, while Ahmadshah and a colleague remained behind, determined to hide as many films as possible. Erlend Clouston describes their activities as follows:

Over the course of two weeks, the two men slipped in through a back door (the front entrance to the office was patrolled by the Taliban), took off their shoes and smuggled cans of film up to a processing studio on the second floor of the building. They made decisions about what film would survive and what was expendable - a surreal jury working in whispers and stockinged feet.

Foreign films, whose negatives were presumably safe elsewhere, stayed on the shelves. But Ahmadshah considered it vital to rescue homegrown work such as *The Suitor*, a 1969 tragi-comedy about a poor boy meeting a rich girl, directed by Khaleq A'lil - a film that has the added anthropological value of revealing the widespread popularity of the miniskirt among Afghan girls 40 years ago. "*We felt it was worth taking the risk,*" the \$50-a-month technician says (emphasis added). "These films belonged to our culture." [...] By the time Ahmadshah's rescue operation was complete in 1996, no fewer than 100,000 hours of film had been stuffed into the studio. A blackboard was nailed over the door, painted and hung with posters. When the Taliban's heresy-hunters arrived, they burned a dozen lorry-loads of film - but missed Ahmadshah's secret cavity.

"The minister for information was there," he recalls. "He said to me, 'If I find one reel hidden in the building, I must kill you.'" [...] Ahmadshah didn't blink when his life was threatened by the minister for information: "I said, 'If it is up to you to kill me, so be it, but it is my promise I have no other films.'"<sup>xxxix</sup>

In this moving story, the continued existence of films that are both a form of cultural heritage and a vehicle for cultural memory comes to depend on the outcome of

probabilistic reasoning in relation to clearly defined threats. Engaged in by individuals working for one of the many institutions that exist around the world to somehow defend film, this reasoning occurred in a situation of considerable uncertainty where death was one of the possible outcomes being entertained.

The example of Ahmadshah and Afghan Film points to the fragility of film's institutions in some parts of the world, and to the courage and passion that may be needed to create and sustain them, or to defend their remains until such time when they can be revived or reconstituted, perhaps in a new form. But there are also many examples of film institutions being created as a means of facilitating risk avoidance, a reduction of risk, or a transfer of risk from private individuals to State-funded bodies that are able to offer employees some of the most risk-free work environments imaginable. The history of Western European cinema in the wake of the advent of TV provides many such cases. Indeed, the government-subsidized filmmaking characteristic of many a Western European cinema was a response to the assumption that the production of films involved economic risks so great that directors or producers could not be expected to shoulder them, and certainly not on a regular basis or in numbers sufficient to sustain a national film industry. Shifting some of the costs, and thereby some of the risks, of filmmaking from the private sector to the public sector, governments effectively redefined the economic risks (that is, losses) associated with national film production as the inevitable costs of sustaining national cultures.

A non-European example of the kind of risk-shifting process being evoked here can be found in Syria, where the National Film Organization was created in the mid-60s.

Kiki Kennedy-Day cites the risk aversiveness of private investors as one of the most important reasons for the establishment of the National Film Organization: “Since the private sector had an aversion to risk, the idea of a state-sponsored cinema that was willing to take a chance on unknown young directors was inspired.” One of the first films produced by the Syrian National Film Organization was *Sa’iq al-Shahinah (The Truck Driver, 1967)*, directed by Yugoslavian Bosko Vucinitch, with an all-Syrian cast and crew.<sup>xxx</sup>

While State-funded film institutions in stable democracies are very much about transferring risk from the private to the public sector, and while the civil-servant style employment conditions that such institutions offer are anything but risky, the concept of risk may nonetheless be very much on their employees’ agenda. A case in point is that of New Danish Screen, a funding scheme administered by the Danish Film Institute. New Danish Screen was created with the intent of revitalizing and thereby sustaining a national cinema, by fostering the conditions needed for artistic risk-taking in contexts where film practitioners might be inclined to repeat previously successful formulae. Eva Novrup Redvall’s chapter, entitled “Encouraging Artistic Risk-taking through Film Policy: The Case of New Danish Screen,” looks closely at this scheme, and makes a compelling case for seeing concepts of risk as pivotal in some instances, not only to the work of funding bodies, but also of policymakers.

Filmmaking requires training, of some kind, and this may be acquired in a number of ways, including the following: by completing the curriculum of a conservatoire-style institution with, typically, highly competitive admissions standards; through an

apprenticeship model involving a series of jobs in the film industry; by becoming part of a network of practitioners where sociability based on friendship and shared interests and passions facilitates a generous sharing of knowledge and know-how. Film education, be it formal and structured or more fluid, ad hoc, and improvised, is also, much like archives and institutes, part of the institutional fabric of cinema. And in the area of film education thinking about risk is, once again, unavoidable. In the case of improvised arrangements made possible by passion, generosity and a strong sense of shared purpose, risk is, much as in the case of Afghan Film evoked above, often a matter of probabilistic reasoning about life-threatening events. For example, in “Reel Challenges: Socially Conscious Afghan Filmmakers Brave Censorship, Poverty and Death Threats to Get Their Message Out,” Anand Gopal draws attention to the death-defying activities of Asad Salahi, a police officer in Kabul, and a filmmaker with a strong commitment not only to making films, but to training others who might then go on to make them: “I even ran secret training courses for filmmakers in my office until one day the Taleban came and took everything, including the film and cameras.”<sup>xxxix</sup> Many other examples, from many other parts of the world, could be provided.

If we turn to some of the more stable institutional environments for film education, to such robust institutions as the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, the National Film School of Denmark, the Huston School of Film & Digital Media, or the London Film School, we find that thinking about risk takes a different form. Here students are inevitably thought to think about the tensions between the kind of artistic risk-taking that informs and drives personal filmmaking, and the risk-averse tendencies of the film industry where many a film school graduate will eventually have to make his

or her way. In his chapter, entitled “Chance and Change,” Rod Stoneman draws on his experiences as a film commissioner (for Channel 4), as the CEO of the Irish Film Board, and, currently, as the Director of the Huston School of Film & Digital Media to make a case for the pursuit of certain types of risk. There are serious costs involved in conforming to the risk-averse tendencies of the established film industries, and it is thus crucial, Stoneman argues, that budding film practitioners be encouraged to think deeply and systematically about the extent to which various forms of risk-taking are essential to the process of producing meaningful cinematic works with some degree of authenticity.

Film festivals provide yet another example of how the phenomenon of film is supported by a dense institutional network, by iterated practices that are regularly engaged in within the context of established frameworks, or within situations that articulate an aspiration for such frameworks and thus an intent to take up the often difficult task of institution, used here to mean the act of instituting. The scholarly discussion of film festivals, beginning with Marijke de Valck’s *Film Festivals: From European Geopolitics to Global Cinephilia*,<sup>xxxii</sup> and continuing with Dina Iordanova’s team-based “Dynamics of World Cinema” project, constitutes an unusually lively area of ongoing film research. The Film Festival Yearbook series, published by the “Dynamics of World Cinema” team, makes it impossible to ignore the many different and important roles that film festivals (increasingly) play in world cinema today. Of particular interest in the present risk-focused context is some of the research being conducted on a more individual basis by Cheung Tit Leung at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Based on empirical on-site research, and focused on Asian film festivals with a particular emphasis on documentary filmmaking, Cheung Tit Leung’s project has taken him, not only to such

established festivals as the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, but also to a little-known festival in mainland China, called the China Documentary Film Festival (Beijing, Songzhuang Art Center; funded by Li Xianting's Film Fund). Founded in 2003, the festival is to some extent structured by the logic of discretion and secrets. Festival organizers maintain a low profile for the festival, thereby keeping it off the government's radar. Indeed, the programme for the festival is released only one week in advance, a strategy designed to minimize the risk involved in screening "sensitive" films. That is, the festival's modus operandi is traceable to an awareness of risks arising from the nature of the films the organizers seek to show.

Thinking about risk may be less obviously present at the more established, and visible, film festivals, but it is by no means absent. Scholars who have devoted considerable energy to documenting the 6<sup>th</sup> Generation phenomenon in the People's Republic of China often note that labels such as "underground" or "independent", used with reference to filmmakers, have helped to fuel a festival-mediated international interest in such directors as Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, Zhang Yuan, Wang Quan'an, and Lou Ye. Indeed, at times it almost seemed as if festival-organizers' and festival-goers' interest in PRC filmmakers correlates directly with the censorship of their work by PRC officials, with their status as underground filmmakers who knowingly take risks in order to make their censored films. Attributions (whether entirely accurate or not) of risk-taking to filmmakers thus constitute, quite simply, one of the more salient bases for festival inclusion, for access to a global circuit, and for mediation to global audiences.

*Spectatorship*

Film spectators sometimes take risks when they see films. Some of the risks have to do with viewers' awareness of laws governing the conditions under which films may be seen, and with probabilistic reasoning about the likelihood of being caught and punished in connection with transgressions of the relevant codifications. Reporting from Berlin in 2006, Roger Boyes discusses "measures, some of the toughest in Europe," that were "announced after an aggressive campaign by the film industry in Germany, the largest market in the EU and [with] one of the most computer-literate populations." Introduced at the outset of 2007, the then new law threatened Germans who downloaded "films [...] for private use" with two years in prison, while anybody downloading "films for commercial use" faced "up to five years" in jail. The law "infuriated consumer groups", and prompted a response from Patrick von Braunmühl, from the Federation of German Consumer Organisations, who drew attention to the difficulties families faced in trying to monitor the downloading behavior of teenagers still residing at home.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Von Braunmühl's reasoning evokes the phenomenon of risk arising from the behavior of others, and this with reference to serious legal consequences. The rigors of the controversial German law, the thought appears to have been, are such that parents risk (unknowingly) being at risk on account of the (possibly unacknowledged, possibly defiant) risk-taking behavior of their teenagers. Teenagers, it is often emphasized in the literature on risk, tend to reason poorly about risk. Indeed, they typically fail to recognize risks as risk, a common neurological explanation being their still ongoing brain development.

There are, of course, many other (far less obvious) ways in which spectators may be exposed to risks as a result of their decision to see a given film. The Danish filmmaker Lone Scherfig (known for her Dogma film, *Italiensk for begyndere* [*Italian for*



*Beginners*, 2000] and, more recently, for *An Education* [2009]) recalls how her father once shared a room in the Copenhagen hospital commonly referred to as *Riget* (*The Kingdom*) with a patient who insisted on being treated by Dr Moesgaard, the doctor (played by Holger Juul Hansen) in Lars von Trier's *Riget*.<sup>xxxiv</sup> While this particular spectator failed to distinguish competently between fiction and reality, and acquired false beliefs as a result, more competent viewers who do not succumb to illusionism may also acquire attitudes or beliefs that are unlikely to serve them well in real-world contexts. Taking its name from Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, the "Werther effect" is a term used by psychologists and others to describe situations in which spectator's engagement with fictional depictions of suicide end up motivating actual suicides. There are also well documented cases of successful fictional crimes serving as models for (typically unsuccessful) crimes in the real world: "The Godfather movies [...] also led to instances of life imitating art. Some organized criminals imitated behaviors from these films."<sup>xxxv</sup> These examples of how spectatorship may be imbricated with either an inadvertent and unknown exposure to risk or with actual risk-taking—a distinction explored at length by Paisley Livingston in "Spectatorship and Risk"—may seem remote from some of the more common or standard forms of film reception. Yet, it is not difficult to imagine far less exceptional examples of spectators' exposure to risk as a result of film viewing, beginning with the uncontroversial case of spectators' acquisition of false beliefs about smoking, as a result of the cinematic representation of this activity as appealing, and this in countless films produced over a significant period of time. In *Film and Risk*, the fascinating idea that spectators take risks when watching films is explored by a number of contributors (see the research questions below). For example, in "The Financial and

Economic Risks of Film Production” Mike Pokorny and John Sedgwick invite us to think of films as involving “risk environments,” and to think of spectators as entering these environments when they opt to see a given film.

### *Cinematic Authorship*

“Authorship” was once thought of by film scholars, not in terms of practitioner’s agency or deliberative practices, but in terms of such forces as ideology or pan-cultural psychological constants, and their manifestation at the level of textual structures. This situation has changed dramatically in recent years, with philosophers such as Paisley Livingston making a compelling case for renewed interest in cinematic authorship.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

The proposals developed by Livingston and others acknowledge the collaborative dimensions of filmmaking, and thus in no wise involve a return to the wrongheaded ideas of cinematic authorship that film scholars once derived from literature, and which scholars influenced by Marxism, semiotics, and psychoanalysis rightly rejected. The new, more analytically-oriented debates about cinematic authorship foreground such issues as collaboration, control, non-accidental contributions to the filmmaking process, and the presence or absence of coercion. Drawing on V.F. Perkins’ insistence on control as crucial, Livingston, for example, works with a non-coercion clause. In the current context this is fascinating, for coercion can, of course, be a matter of threats and thus of risks.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In the present context, I am interested in what a focus on risk might bring to the discussion of cinematic authorship. I would like briefly to evoke three thought-provoking cases that point to risk as a decisive factor in cinematic authorship. The first case suggests

that exposure to inevitable risks can weaken the articulations between the various collaborative dimensions of cinematic authorship. The second suggests that risk is unequally distributed across the filmmaking process, and that the distribution of risk may well have implications for how we go about identifying the (principal) authors of a film. The third case shows that a practitioner's risk environment, to borrow Pokorny and Sedgwick's term, can negate control to the point where it becomes difficult to think of that practitioner as genuinely authoring a given film.

Anders Høgsbro Østergaard's award-winning documentary film entitled *Burma VJ* documents the "rebellion of Buddhist monks against Burma's military junta"<sup>xxxviii</sup> in 2007, and the activity of the video activists whose images of the rebellion were the outside world's sole source of information about the unfolding events. At the time of the rebellion Østergaard was already making a documentary about the Burmese video activists, who intrigued him on account of their risktaking:

To begin with, I was mainly interested in my central character as a documentarian. [...] He and his friends have to film with their cameras concealed in bags, which obviously is a major restriction on what they are able to document. My interest, then, was more about why they were even doing what they were doing. Why do they expose themselves to such risk? What are their thoughts about it and how are they affected by what they do? I was fascinated by my protagonist's almost instinctive need to document the world, which apparently came before any considerations about what political goals they might serve. My film was a small, intimate, psychological affair. Then came the rebellion.<sup>xxxix</sup>

At the time of the rebellion's eruption, Østergaard had virtually completed a short documentary portrait of the Burmese video activists. However, when images of the rebellion started flooding into Oslo, where the Voice of Burma (DVB) is based, the director decided to re-think his project. The rebellion aggravated the risks being taken by the video reporters, but it also had the effect of diminishing Østergaard's control over a film-making process that had involved collaboration with the Burmese video activists, and especially the main protagonist, referred to as Joshua. The loss of control is clearly described by the film's editor, Billeskov Jansen, in an interview conducted by Lars Movin:

The filmmakers faced the problem that the tapes they received in Denmark had been recorded over in Burma or Thailand, so there was no guarantee that the footage was in actual chronological order. Also, they didn't know how many photographers had been present at the different events. Finally, it seemed almost impossible to pin down what shots had been made on what days. Then help arrived from an unexpected place: "We discovered that we could log on to Google Earth and locate Rangoon, zoom in as far as we could go and still maintain relatively good resolution," Billeskov Jansen says, "much higher quality images that you get if you look at Copenhagen, for instance. At first, I wondered about that, but then I tried looking at other areas where you would expect the West to have military interests and the images of those places generally looked better, too. That way, we were able to identify the locations of buildings and streets we recognised from the videotapes."<sup>x1</sup>

An intensification or aggravation of risks borne by some of the contributors to the filmmaking process can have the effect of disarticulating that process in ways that make properly coordinated, collaborative efforts difficult. If cinematic authorship does indeed admit of different types, as I believe it does, then the presence of particular kinds of risk may well be one of the factors determining the category of cinematic authorship to which a given film belongs.

My second example of risk playing a role in the determination of cinematic authorship is a so-called Dogma film, that is, a film made in accordance with the rules specified in the “Vow of Chastity” that filmmaker Lars von Trier flamboyantly announced in Paris in 1995. Lone Scherfig’s *Italiensk for begyndere* (*Italian for Beginners*, 2000) was the first Dogma film to be made by a woman, and took Dogma in a new and interesting direction. In the Spring of 2008 I interviewed two of the actors who had worked with Scherfig on *Italian for Beginners*, as well as the film’s cinematographer, editor, and sound person. The aim was to understand, through careful consideration of these practitioners’ agency, what the differentiated impact of the Dogma rules was on the different action roles that contribute to the filmmaking process.<sup>xli</sup> I was particularly struck by what Rune Palving, the sound person had to say about the rules’ implications. One of the things he foregrounded is just how risky a Dogma project is, from the perspective of the person in charge of the sound. The rules, after all, specify that the sound must be recorded at the same time as the image, and that no manipulations of the sound or of the image can take place during the postproduction phase. What you have once shooting is completed is essentially what you get. Palving described his understanding of the risks of Dogma as follows:

It was my first film, so for me it was really a big gamble. You could really put your whole career at risk. If Dogma goes wrong, it goes really wrong. You can't save it. There is nothing to be done in the postproduction phase.

Palving went on to note that he was convinced that he was given the opportunity to work on *Italian for Beginners* because more established sound designers with more of a reputation to lose had quite simply been unwilling to take the requisite risks. What is interesting is that Palving also identified the gains of the Dogma process, from the point of view of the sound designer, as having to do with enhanced control, power, and stature, in connection with the filmmaking process. Because the sound can't be "fixed" during the postproduction phase, the sound person's authority and decision-making capacity are considerably enhanced by the Dogma rules. Palving's reasoning suggests that there may be forms of risk-taking that correlate with status, authority, and control; if this is so, then individuals occupying the relevant risk positions become prime candidates for consideration as cinematic authors, if, that is, we accept that control is indeed a decisive factor for cinematic authorship (which I do).

My last example of how risk can have an impact on cinematic authorship is that of Shin Sang-ok, a South Korean film director who was abducted in 1978, while filming in Hong Kong. North Korean Kim Jong-il is generally assumed to have orchestrated the abduction, not only of Shin Sang-ok, but of his wife, actress Cho Eun-hee (in a separate incident). Shin and Choi escaped from North Korea in 1986, but only after a failed attempt at escape that led to Shin's incarceration in a prison camp, where he claims to have had to rely on grass and tree bark in order to survive. Shin's best known North Korean film is *Pulgasari*, a monster movie resembling the Japanese Godzilla movies.<sup>xlii</sup>

Shin and Choi “quoted Kim as telling them that he had ordered them ‘brought’ to North Korea to help develop its film industry.” They described Kim as a “movie buff” and indicated that the North Korean leader had a particular fondness for “adventure movies, like ‘Indiana Jones.’”<sup>xliii</sup> There can be little doubt that risk—risk of incarceration or death—overshadowed Shin’s North Korean filmmaking career. The question is: what were the implications of this risk environment for his cinematic agency, and for his capacity genuinely to author films? This is the kind of question to which a number of quite different *speculative* responses can be given. A persuasive response would be one that draws on empirical data of the kind that quite simply, at least to my knowledge, isn’t available. So we cannot settle the question here. The story of the abducted filmmaker whose authorship was to some extent coerced does, however, remain instructive for it points to a limit case where agency, and thus authorship, is eclipsed by threats and the risks that they evoke.

#### *The Natural Environment*<sup>xliv</sup>

Up until this point, I have been exploring some of the ways in which risks and risk-taking can be understood as relevant to broad areas that are usually thought of as central to Film Studies. I would like to conclude with some examples of film’s involvement with risk that point, not to established areas of interest, but to a new area of concern requiring urgent attention: film and the environment. In 2006 Jiang Zhuqing and Wang Shanshan reported as follows on the environmental impact and legal ramifications of established 5<sup>th</sup> generation filmmaker Chen Kaige’s making of *The Promise*:

Early this week, Vice-Minister of Construction Qiu Baoxing criticized the crew that filmed “The Promise” for damaging the pristine environment at Bigu Tianchi in Shangrila County, Southwest China’s Yunnan Province. A reinforced concrete structure was left on the lake’s shore, and more than 100 wooden posts were left in the water, Qiu said. The Beijing News reported on Friday that the crew “The Promise” also damaged about 60 trees in the Yuanmingyuan Garden (Old Summer Palace) during the shooting of an autumn scene. They painted the trees yellow all of them over 10 metres high at the end of 2004, and many have since withered.<sup>xlv</sup>

*The Promise* is but one of countless cases of film production involving serious environmental risks. In the context of filmmaking in mainland China, *The Promise* is, however, a watershed case, for the controversy it generated produced significant mobilization in favor of a “green production code,” with artists and critics calling for legislation designed to protect especially scenic spots. The initiative foregrounded the need to preserve “China’s beautiful scenery [...] on film and in reality,” and called “on producers to exercise self-discipline and government departments, news organizations and environmental groups to enhance supervision.” Coverage of the initiative, in connection with the controversy of Chen’s film, highlighted the extent to which *The Promise* is representative of standard filmmaking practices, rather than a deviation from an acceptable norm. Thus, for example, environmental despoliation resulting from filmmaking were said to have been reported in “the famous Jiuzhaigou nature reserve in Sichuan province and Shennongjia nature reserve in Hubei province.”<sup>xlvi</sup> While the debate generated by *The Promise* focused on what analytic aestheticians with an interest



in environmental aesthetics call “scenic nature”,<sup>xlvii</sup> it did raise the issue of filmmaking’s environmental footprint more generally:

Environmental activists welcomed the publicity of the event and its significance, according to Wang Ping, a member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the national political advisory body. “The environmental impact of cultural and entertainment industries has long been an area covered by no laws and no regulations,” said Wang, a professor of environmental engineering at Beijing University of Industry and Commerce. “Although they are mostly temporary projects, whether shooting a movie or having a festival celebration, they tend to subject the environment to risks,” she said. “Sometimes the pollution of a temporary project can remain forever.”<sup>xlviii</sup>

In their contribution to *Film and Risk*, Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller provide a ground-breaking discussion of the environmental risks associated with filmmaking. Not only do Maxwell and Miller make it crystal-clear that filmmaking has had serious environmental costs from the very beginning of film history, they make a strong case for seeing film spectators and film scholars as having an important role to play in limiting the environmental risks of filmmaking, through judicious and informed viewing choices, among other things.

The risks evoked thus far, in this broad outline of film’s imbrication with risk, have mostly involved various forms of harm, the threat, that is, of possible negative consequences being actualized. But risk is not necessarily negative, and there is considerable evidence to suggest that there are strong links between a highly valued phenomenon such as creativity and risk-taking. One of the tasks that I see *Film and Risk*

as taking up is that of bringing into clear focus the more positive meanings of “risk” in the context of film. One clear thread running through the volume is the thought that the growing insistence on risk management in various film-related contexts has serious costs, one such cost being that it is becoming more and more difficult for practitioners to work under the kinds of circumstances that make meaningful artistic risk-taking, and thus creativity, possible. In its own modest way, then, *Film and Risk* is an attempt to support those increasingly embattled individuals who remain committed to meaningful artistic risk-taking. *Film and Risk*, I believe, spells out a number of quite convincing arguments that could prove helpful to those who continue to defend those shrinking spaces where meaningful artistic risk-taking remains possible, in the context of film schools, for example, or film institutes.

#### *Organizing/Methodological Principles*

To be able to begin seriously to debate, let alone fully understand the role played by risk in film it is necessary to work in an interdisciplinary way. Suffice it to say that in my view interdisciplinarity should involve actually engaging, through shared research projects, with scholars working within other disciplines. That is, the gains that are to be had from interdisciplinary research are most likely to arise if scholars do more than simply read articles or books written by scholars from other disciplines. Indeed, the point could be put more negatively, and more forcefully. Selective reading of work from other disciplines, without any actual interaction with scholars from those disciplines, can easily lead to distortions and misunderstandings, however creative the appropriations might ultimately be. Interdisciplinarity, in my view, is at its most fruitful when thinkers with

shared interests manage to transcend the limitations of their respective disciplines, in order to work in a sustained and productive way, from a range of different angles, on issues of shared concern. *Film and Risk* is not the product of this ideal form of interdisciplinarity, for authors, each with his or her specific area of expertise, worked largely independently of each other. At the same time, *Film and Risk* does foster and provide a basis for the kind of interdisciplinary conversation that I see as being necessary, by bringing together the findings of scholars from such disciplines as philosophy, anthropology, film studies, economics, and cultural studies. Interdisciplinarity should not only be about facilitating and eventually transcending the disciplinary demarcations of academic or theoretical knowledge, but also about working across the boundaries between theory and practice. As a result *Film and Risk* also includes contributions by a lawyer with expertise in entertainment law (Bill Grantham), as well as contributions by practitioners with experience in the areas of filmmaking (Helen Grace, Rod Stoneman) and photojournalism (Michelle Woodward).

As the categories of research questions identified below suggest, some of the contributions do converge on similar issues. Although the contributions have not been divided into categories, each with its own sub-heading, the order of the chapters is by no means arbitrary. Among other things, the first three chapters (by Hjort, Livingston, and Ponech) survey some of the conceptual terrain that is relevant to understanding risk and its relation to film. The next three chapters (by Martin, Ginsburg, and Naficy) focus intensely on risk as it arises in the context of the practice of filmmaking, on what I would like to call “practitioner’s risk.” Subsequent chapters by Choi, Pokorny & Sedgwick, Grantham, and Grace offer various takes on economic risk in the context of film

production. The concluding chapters, by Redvall, Woodward, Stoneman, and Maxwell & Miller, make it clear just how decisive a role thinking about risk has played, and continues to play, in the context of the development of film's institutional landscape.

### *Contributors' Research Questions*

#### **Conceptualizing Risk**

1. What are the different available models for thinking about risk, and how is the multi-faceted phenomenon of risk best approached in the context of film? (Hjort; Ponech)
2. What is the difference between running a risk and taking a risk? (Livingston)
3. What is the nature of risk inadvertence? (Ponech)
4. What is the relation between contingency or chance and risk, in the context of film? (Stoneman)
5. Can artists' experimentations with chance help us to understand some of the more positive dimensions of risk? (Stoneman)
6. Should the current emphasis on risk aversion in different spheres of public life be seen as constraining the artistic imagination? (Stoneman)
7. What are the losses entailed by a now dominant discourse of risk management? (Grace)
8. What counts as aesthetic risk? (Grace)

#### **The Representation and/or Discernability of Risk in Film**

9. What are the implications of relative degrees of risk discernability in film? (Hjort)
10. Is the "imperfection" that often characterizes the "accented" style of exilic, diasporic, and ethnic filmmakers the mark of risks incurred or taken during the production process? (Naficy)
11. What role can films, especially documentaries, play in alerting spectators to the persistence of social and political dangers that place certain groups at serious risk? (Ginsburg)
12. What are some of the problems involved in identifying and classifying risks, in real world situations, and in the context of viewing cinematic works? (Livingston; Ponech)
13. What are some of the artistic risks arising from the representation of risk in cinematic works? (Livingston)
14. To what extent does a distinction between running a risk and taking a risk inform cinematic representations of risk? (Livingston)
15. How do we explain the pervasiveness of representations of risk in the cinema? (Livingston)
16. Is "active risk" part of what makes a story a story, and the depiction of risk thus "elemental to narrative"? (Ponech)
17. Why do some filmmakers choose to relinquish favorable "risk positions" in favor of risk positions that involve avoidable and excessive risks? And why do they

- choose to represent this very process of trading risk positions in their films?<sup>xlix</sup>  
(Hjort)
18. Can cinematic works focusing on risk inadvertence make a contribution to risk perception studies? (Ponech)
  19. How have the norms of photojournalism changed since the 1930s, with regard to the depiction of risk? (Woodward)
  20. How do photojournalists see currently dominant visual norms, and what are the likely implications for future practice? (Woodward)

### **Spectators' Engagement with Risk**

21. Can the appeal of cinematic spectacles of extreme risk be explained in terms of their offering the possibility of a relatively low-risk engagement with high risk? (Livingston)
22. What is the epistemic value to spectators of cinematic explorations of extreme risk taking and/or risk advertence? (Ponech)
23. What are the key environmental risks associated with the consumption of films (Maxwell and Miller)
24. Do film spectators have an obligation to think about the risks to the environment that are entailed by the films they see and enjoy? (Maxwell and Miller)
25. What effect do photojournalistic norms emphasizing “visual drama” have on “what viewers learn about a given situation?” (Woodward)
26. In what sense can viewers be said to “enter a risk environment when choosing to view a movie”? (Pokorny and Sedgwick)

### **Practitioners (Directors, Professional and Non-professional Actors, Stunt-persons, and Photojournalists)**

27. What are the different types of risk that arise in connection with film production? (Hjort)
28. What are the ethical implications of risk taking in the context of cinematic production? (Hjort)
29. Why is risk-taking inevitable for exilic, diasporic, and ethnic filmmakers? (Naficy)
30. What are the risk strategies adopted by accented filmmakers? (Naficy)
31. What kinds of consequences do these strategies entail, for the filmmakers in the first instance, but also for their films? (Naficy)
32. What role do various forms of state control play in shaping the kinds and degrees of risk to which exilic, diasporic, émigré, and ethnic filmmakers are exposed? (Naficy)
33. What are the risk attitudes of stunt workers, and especially stunt doubles? (Martin)
34. How are these attitudes shaped by the priorities of the commercial film industries? (Martin)
35. What light do partnerships involving non-disabled filmmakers and disabled subjects shed on the differentiated distribution of risk within the filmmaking process? (Ginsburg)

36. What is to be gained, from the point of view of disabled persons, from taking the risk of visibility, from exposing oneself, through film, to potential ridicule from unenlightened audiences? (Ginsburg)
37. What are some of the progressive, hopeful, and socially enabling roles that risk-taking, behind and especially in front of the camera, can play? (Ginsburg)
38. What is the role of cinematic risk-taking in fostering mediated forms of kinship that extend well beyond the biological family? (Ginsburg)
39. What is the relation between risk-taking and activism (Ginsburg; Hjort)
40. What are some of the differences between two contexts of commercial film production, that of Hollywood and Hong Kong, and what are the implications of these differences for stunt workers and their attitudes towards risk? (Martin)
41. Have attitudes towards risk, in filmmaking milieus, changed significantly in the course of film's history, and what do any such changes tell us about cultural shifts regarding the understanding of, and value attributed to, risk and risk taking? (Hjort)
42. Is there a conceptually precise way of distinguishing between meaningful risk-taking warranting affirmation in the context of cinematic production, and risk-taking that is ultimately less than admirable? (Hjort)
43. Can the now dominant norms of photojournalism be seen as necessitating extreme risk-taking on the part of photojournalists? (Woodward)
44. What are the different kinds of risks that photojournalists (are required to) take? (Woodward)
45. What are the consequences when creative practitioners understand risk in terms that are very different from those adopted by risk management agencies? (Grace)

### **Money: Profits and Losses**

46. What are the ways in which Hollywood financiers have sought, historically and more recently, to diminish the economic risks of producing films? (Maxwell and Miller)
47. How have models of film financing evolved over the last quarter of a century, in the US? (Graham)
48. What implications do these models have for the allocation and distribution of risks? (Graham)
49. What kind of impact has the global recession that began in 2008 had on the various funding mechanisms associated with commercial filmmaking in the US? (Graham)
50. What roles do risk aversion and the disregarding of risk play in film financing transactions? (Graham)
51. Is it possible to envisage a more rational model of film financing, and, if so, what would its defining features be? (Graham)
52. How effective is transnational cinema, and more specifically pan-Asian cinema, as a means of managing financial risk within a globalized film industry? (Choi)
53. Does the kind of multinational casting that is a feature of pan-Asian cinema involve epistemic risk, and if so, what is its nature? (Choi)

54. Does multinational casting produce the “epistemic conditions under which audiences with cultural knowledge depreciate the aesthetic value of a work”, and should these conditions be seen as entailing financial risk? (Choi)
55. What is the risk environment of Hollywood film production? (Pokorny and Sedgwick)
56. What are the factors that shape this environment? (Pokorny and Sedgwick)
57. What are some of the similarities between the relevant risk environment and that of “other industries in which only a small proportion of outputs are profitable”? (Pokorny and Sedgwick)
58. Is there a reliable methodology for accurately predicting which films will be profitable? (Pokorny and Sedgwick)
59. Would filmmakers such as Eisenstein and Godard have been able to thrive under the currently dominant conditions for financing creativity? If not, what does that tell us about current norms? (Grace)

### **The Institutional Dimension: Film Policies, Film Commissioners and Photography Agencies**

60. Should film policies be assessed partly in terms of their implications for environmental sustainability? (Maxwell and Miller)
61. Are there any policy initiatives, internal to film production companies or at the level of government or international agreements, which aim to diminish the environmental risks entailed by film production? (Maxwell and Miller)
62. Can artistic risk-taking be fostered through film policies? (Redvall)
63. How essential is it to the survival of a small national film industry that filmmakers continue to take artistic risks? (Redvall)
64. How effective is one particular example of a film policy designed to promote artistic risk-taking for the purposes of securing innovation within the context of a small-national cinema? (Redvall)
65. How central have concepts of risk been to the work of such film commissioning institutions as Channel 4 and the Irish Film Board? (Stoneman)
66. What do (changing) attitudes towards risk tell us about the priorities of film commissioners, and about the wider cultural landscape within which they work? (Stoneman)
67. What is the difference, as a film commissioner, between being fearless and being reckless? (Stoneman)
68. What has the impact of the influential photography agency Magnum Photos, founded in 1947, been on the visual norms of photojournalism, particularly with regard to the depiction of risk? (Woodward)

### **Filmmaking and the Environment**

69. What are the key environmental risks associated with filmmaking? (Maxwell and Miller)
70. What is the impact of Hollywood filmmaking on the environment? (Maxwell and Miller)
71. What are the environmental costs associated with certain stylistic or formal cinematic preferences? (Maxwell and Miller)

72. What role did competitive capitalist practices play in the development of film production as a high-risk activity, in environmental terms (Maxwell and Miller)
73. What are some of the central examples of environmental despoliation resulting from film production, and what conclusions are we warranted in drawing from the relevant production histories? (Maxwell and Miller)
74. What are the environmental risk implications of the growing tendency for filmmakers to embrace digital technology? (Maxwell and Miller)
75. Is it sufficient for film scholars to take up environmental issues uniquely in terms of the themes/representations of the films they study, or is an entirely different approach called for at this point? (Maxwell and Miller)

### *The Capaciousness of Risk Studies*

As the above list of research questions indicates, risk is a topic that invites exploration from a wide range of perspectives. There is still much work to be done on film and risk, and it is my hope that the present volume will inspire others to further deepen the discussion, or to take it in new directions. Far from being the kind of topic that is likely to be of interest to only one of the various factions to which film scholars might be inclined to belong, the term “risk”, I believe, points to an inclusive area of inquiry that can accommodate film scholars with quite different priorities and commitments. In taking up risk as a research topic, film scholars with a strong commitment to drawing on evolutionary psychology for the purposes of understanding of film cognition might, for example, be inclined to draw on some of the work on human beings’ genetic dispositions to perceive certain environments as risky, and to do this in relation to film cognition. Scholars who see their interests in film as being more cultural, social, and political may well find the concept of risk to be a useful means of pinpointing the effects of unequal distributions of power, as well as of identifying some of the strategies that have been adopted in response to such inequities. For scholars such as myself, who are interested in practitioner’s agency (essentially the ways in which filmmakers subjectively understand their practices), the broadly institutional dimensions of film, and the ways in which these



areas intersect, risk is a particularly fruitful research topic. This is so because risk invites us to think in terms of a wide range of factors: genetic endowments linked to evolutionary history, individual self-understandings and actions, social context and culture, and the combined effect, over time, of disparate and uncoordinated activities that nonetheless ultimately intersect.

It is my hope that *Film and Risk* will stimulate some interesting discussions, and bring together interlocutors who might not otherwise be inclined to seek each other out. It is also my hope that *Film and Risk* will encourage film scholars to engage seriously with a number of increasingly urgent challenges having to do, among other things, with the sustainability of film. Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller's chapter, entitled "Film and the Environment: Risk Off-Screen," is, in my view, agenda-setting in this regard. To adopt risk as a framework for analysis, their chapter clearly demonstrates, is, potentially, to bring neglected issues warranting serious discussion into sharp focus.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Peter L. Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998), 1.

<sup>ii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>iii</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

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- <sup>v</sup> See Charles Taylor's work on multiple modernities, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- <sup>vi</sup> Lucy Mazdon, *Encore Hollywood: Remaking French Cinema* (London: BFI Publications, 2008).
- <sup>vii</sup> Murray Smith, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances", in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 236.
- <sup>viii</sup> Berys Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156.
- <sup>ix</sup> Rod Stoneman, *Chávez: The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: A Case Study of Politics and the Media* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 9.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.
- <sup>xi</sup> John Sedgwick and Mike Pokorny, "The Risk Environment of Film-Making: Warner in the Inter-War Period," *Explorations in Economic History* 35 (1998).
- <sup>xii</sup> (London: Routledge, 1996).
- <sup>xiii</sup> (London: Hodder Arnold, 2007).
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), vii.
- <sup>xv</sup> Kristine Harris, "The New Woman Incident: Cinema, Scandal and Spectacle in 1935 Shanghai," in *Transnational Chinese Cinemas*, ed. Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 277.
- <sup>xvi</sup> For a fuller discussion of Ruan Lingyu's acting, and her contributions to the Golden Age of Chinese cinema, see Mette Hjort, "Ruan Lingyu: Reflections on an Individual Performance Style," in *Chinese Film Stars*, eds. Yingjin Zhang and Mary Farquhar (London: Routledge, 2010).

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<sup>xvii</sup> Michael Chang, “The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Movie Actresses and Public Discourse in Shanghai, 1920s-1930s,” in *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943*, ed. Yingjin Zhang (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 136.

<sup>xviii</sup> Bérénice Reynaud, “Glamour and Suffering: Gong Li and the History of Chinese Stars,” in *Women and Film: A Sight and Sound Reader*, eds. Pam Cook and Philip Dodd (London: British Film Institute, 1993), 25.

<sup>xix</sup> Shu Kei, “La légende de Ruan Lingyu,” in *Le Cinéma chinois*, eds. Margoli Reclus and Marie-Claire Quiquemelle (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1984), 152-4.

<sup>xx</sup> Quoted in Richard Meyer, *Ruan Ling-Yu: The Goddess of Shanghai* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 50.

<sup>xxi</sup> Stuart Jeffries, “Bigger Issues,” *The Review: Sunday Morning Post (South China Morning Post)*, February 21, 2010.

<sup>xxii</sup> In “Out of Action”, Clarence Tsui’s interview-based article on Jackie Chan, risk-taking is very much the red thread lending cohesion to the performer’s entire career: “His standing as one of the world’s most inventive daredevils may be intact but he will be 55 next month; the end of his stunt-driven, high-wire existence is certainly nigh. Chan says he anticipated that a long time ago and that ‘it’s a miracle that I’ve survived’.”

*PostMagazine, South China Morning Post* (2009), 25. See [scmp.com/video](http://scmp.com/video) for the interview with Jackie Chan, as well as clips from his films. Working as I do at Lingnan, an unusually plucky university in Hong Kong, China, mention of Jackie Chan is inevitable: the gymnasium and pool that are prominent features of our institutional landscape were gifts to Lingnan from Chan. These gifts, I like to think, express the performer’s recognition of Lingnan as somehow like-minded, as an institution that was

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built and sustained by especially courageous educators, many of them highly skilled risk-takers.

<sup>xxiii</sup> David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 4.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See “Women Make Movies” for more information about the film:

<http://www.wmm.com/filmCatalog/pages/c702.shtml>

<sup>xxv</sup> Lars Movin, “Rum til refleksion,” *FILM*, 56 (April 2007), 16.

<sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xxvii</sup> For a particularly influential discussion of “general style”, to which collective style arguably belongs, see Richard Wollheim, “Pictorial Style: Two Views,” in *The Concept of Style*, ed. Berel Lang (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Kiki Kennedy-Day, “Cinema in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Kuwait,” in *Companion Encyclopedia of Middle Eastern and North African Film*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2001), 374.

<sup>xxix</sup> Erlend Clouston, “If I Find One Reel, I Must Kill You,” *The Guardian*, 20 February, 2008; see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/feb/20/features.afghanistan>

<sup>xxx</sup> “Cinema in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Kuwait,” 390.

<sup>xxxi</sup> *South China Morning Post*, 5 February, 2009.

<sup>xxxii</sup> (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2007).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Roger Boyes, “Two Years in Prison for Downloading Latest Film,” *Timesonline*, 24 March, 2006; see <http://technology.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,20409-2100973,00.html>

<sup>xxxiv</sup> *Politiken*, *FILM*, February 2, 2010. I am very grateful to Peter Schepelern for alerting me to this anecdote.



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<sup>xxxv</sup> Mark Jones, “The Historical Impact of Organized Crime on American Society,” in *Organized Crime: From Trafficking to Terrorism*, eds. Frank Shanty, Patit Maban Mishra (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio Inc, 2005), 22.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> See Paisley Livingston’s *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman: On Film as Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 63-83; and Berys Gaut, “Film, Authorship and Collaboration,” in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, eds. Murray Smith and Richard Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman*, 72.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Lars Movin, “Barefoot Reporter in Burma,” *FILM* 64 (November 2008), 3.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Cited in “Barefoot Reporter in Burma,” 3.

<sup>xl</sup> Lars Movin, “Thank You, Google Earth,” *FILM* 64 (November 2008), 6.

<sup>xli</sup> For a much more ample discussion of this material, see Mette Hjort, *Lone Scherfig’s “Italian for Beginners”* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

<sup>xlii</sup> Jon Herskovitz, “Abducted S Korean film director dies,” *Indian express.com*, April 13, 2006; <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/abducted-s-korean-film-director-dies/2299/0> (accessed March 18, 2010).

<sup>xliii</sup> NA, “Shin Sang Ok, 80; S. Korean Director Abducted by North,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 2006; <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/apr/14/local/me-shin14> (accessed March 26, 2010).

<sup>xliv</sup> Jiang Zhuqing and Wang Shanshan, “Filming Ban Aims to Protect Scenic Areas,” 13 May, 2006, 1-2; see *China Daily*; [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-05/13/content\\_589018.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-05/13/content_589018.htm), (accessed March 18, 2010).

<sup>xlv</sup> “Filming Ban.”

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<sup>xlvi</sup> NA, “Film producers make green pledge after Promise incident,” *People’s Daily Online*, March 13, 2006;

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<sup>xlvii</sup> See, for example, Yuriko Saito’s “The Aesthetics of Unscenic Nature,” in *Nature, Aesthetics, and Environmentalism: From Beauty to Duty*, eds. Allen Carlson and Sheila Lintott, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>xlviii</sup> “Filming Ban”, 2.

<sup>xlix</sup> For a discussion of risk positions, see Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, translated by Mark Ritter (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1992), 26.