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A Tale of Two Cities: Parasitical Interdependence in Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite* and Kurosawa Akira's *High and Low*

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This essay examines Kurosawa Akira's *High and Low* (*Tengoku to jigoku*, 1963) and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (*Gisaengchung*, 2019) to show how both disclose the structural relations between wealth and poverty and create spaces in which to think about social inequality. Both are set against competing backdrops of modernist houses that loom above the lower depths of working-class neighborhoods. Whereas *High and Low*, as indicated by its original Japanese title, highlights the stark contrasts between wealthy areas (heaven) and earthly prisons (hell), *Parasite* closely considers the dysfunctional and parasitic relations between the people who inhabit these spaces. Each film's use of elaborate sets, masterful blocking and montage, visual and narrative metaphors, and genre mixing comes together in ways that disclose the systemic nature of wealth and poverty.

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In both Kurosawa Akira's *High and Low* (*Tengoku to jigoku*, 1963) and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (*Gisaengchung*, 2019), tales of class warfare play out against competing backdrops of modernist houses "that look like heaven" and squalid working-class apartments and neighborhoods. The house that looms above the neighborhood serves as the catalyst for a kidnapping in *High and Low*, which is set in Tokyo and Yokohama in the high-growth era of the early 1960s. The narrative and thematic possibilities only expand when a kidnapper targets the wrong child. The original Japanese title, which means "Heaven and Hell," expresses the gulf between the rich and ordered parts of cities and the earthly prisons inhabited by poorer people below. *Parasite*, set in contemporary Seoul in the long-term aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis of the late 1990s, begins like a comedy about a family of lovable con artists who manipulate their way into service in the household of a very wealthy family but ends in violence as they fight to keep their positions. Its title expresses the dysfunctional and parasitic relationship between the people who inhabit the high and low spaces of rich and poor.[1] Bong's interview in Catherine Cadou's (2011) Kurosawa documentary, *Kurosawa's Way*, where he focuses on the use of space in *High and Low*, suggests that Boon draws inspiration from Kurosawa. Each film's use of elaborate sets, masterful blocking and montage, visual and narrative metaphors, and mixing of genres comes together in ways that disclose the structural relation between wealth and poverty and create spaces for thinking about social inequality.

High and Low, Kidnapping, and Japan's High-Growth Era

Kurosawa made *High and Low*, loosely based on *King's Ransom* by American author Ed McBain, in part "because he wanted to show the audience how detestable a kidnapping is" (Yoshimoto 2000, 306). It opens in a modernist house on a hill, and will stay there for the entire first part of the film (apart from brief scenes just outside the house). Gondo Kingo (Mifune Toshiro), an executive at a shoe company, is meeting with other company executives who inform him of their plan to take over the company, National Shoes, from the founder in order to make cheaper but more fashionable shoes. Gondo picks up one of the new pumps and destroys their plan as easily as he destroys the shoe. Certainly, he says, more fashionable shoes would be beneficial, but not at the expense of quality. With this scene, Gondo is introduced as an old-school capitalist: one who has no problem making money but also sees value in what he creates. But this picture of Gondo is incomplete. Shortly after the other executives are angrily ushered out of Gondo's house, we learn he has already set into motion a plan to take over the company, one that does not require alliances with the directors whose vision he fundamentally opposes. Gondo has been buying up shares and will, this very night, close a deal giving

him a controlling interest that will allow him to oust the founder. However, this deal has only been made possible through mortgaging all of his own family's assets. This efficient scene where viewers learn of his plans to take control of the company changes our assessment of Gondo: though he still seeks to make a quality product, he's every bit as bloodthirsty and manipulative as the other directors.

Just as his secretary Kawanishi (Mihashi Yatsuya) is about to fly to Osaka to seal the deal, the phone rings. On the line is a man who claims to have kidnapped Gondo's son, Jun, for ransom (**Figure 1**). Moments after hanging up, Jun walks into the room looking for his playmate Shin'ichi, the son of Gondo's chauffeur (**Figure 2**). Once they get over their confusion, Gondo and his wife feel relieved, since they believe "no one

Figure 1: The first call from kidnapper. Notice the tight grouping of Gondo and his wife, with Kawanishi a bit of a distance from his boss, and Aoki the chauffeur in the background. Blocking suggests that all are concerned about the call, with Jun's parents most concerned. *High and Low*, 1963, 17:23.

Figure 2: Jun walks into the room. He and Gondo are placed in the center of the frame, but the presence of Aoki in the far-left background hints at the role he will soon play in Gondo's ethical dilemma. *High and Low*, 1963, 18:40.

could demand ransom from a chauffeur's son," though of course this is exactly what the kidnapper does once he discovers his mistake. This move raises the ethical question at the heart of the first part of *High and Low*: will Gondo pay the ransom for another man's son? If he does, a boy's life will be saved, albeit at great personal expense. His fortune will be gone, as will any plan to take over the company, and he will have forced his wife (the daughter of the company's founder whose dowry formed the basis of his fortune) into an unfamiliar life of poverty.

The kidnapper's second phone call arrives after the police have set up a recording device on the phone. Kurosawa introduces a wipe cut immediately after Gondo answers the phone, cutting to Gondo, his wife, his son, the police, and Aoki grouped around the sofa listening to the recording of the phone call. Over the next several minutes of the first part of the film, viewers, who have been sutured into identifying with Gondo watch as he is increasingly pushed from the center, indeed, almost outside the frame, as he grapples with his ethical dilemma. Before this point, Gondo has been positioned squarely at the center of almost every frame, as someone able to control the narrative and his destiny. Once the kidnapper states that his demands hold regardless of which child was kidnapped, Gondo's stable position at the center is upended. While he seems willing to do anything to save his own son, he refuses to pay the ransom for Shin'ichi. Through masterful blocking involving Gondo, Kawanishi, and Reiko, Kurosawa reveals Gondo's ethical dilemma.

As he listens, Gondo moves further to the edges of the room, as if to avoid the impossible situation he faces. At one point, the camera presents a shot in which Gondo and the chauffeur Aoki (Sada Yutaka) are on opposite sides of the frame (**Figure 3**), visually underscoring their different social positions. The policemen's reactions stand in for our own as viewers. After the recording ends, Kawanishi moves toward the center of the frame, until Gondo is sandwiched between him (representative of his ambitions) and Aoki (representative of his fatherly or humane impulses, as well as his *giri*, or social obligations, to his employee) (**Figure 4**). When Kawanishi defiantly places his hands on his hips as Gondo's wife speaks of his ethical responsibilities toward their chauffeur's boy, Kurosawa subtly suggests the assistant's true nature, which will be confirmed the following morning, when he confesses that he has defected to the other directors because of Gondo's apparent weakness. Just as Gondo tells Kawanishi to go to Osaka, the phone rings for a third time. At the sound, Gondo asks him to wait, deferring his decision to purchase the controlling shares and revealing his ethical struggle.

The kidnapper provides proof of life by allowing the child to speak and then informs Gondo that the child's survival depends upon Gondo's actions. As the kidnapper hangs

Figure 3: Gondo and Aoki are worlds apart as they listen to the kidnapper's second phone call. *High and Low*, 1963, 24:54.

Figure 4: As the phone call is ending, Kurosawa's blocking visually indicates Gondo's ethical dilemma, placing him between Aoki, on the right, and Kawanishi (as the personification of Gondo's ambitions) on the left near the door. As the police talk, Gondo paces between the two poles. *High and Low*, 1963, 25:29.

up, Aoki begs for Gondo's help. Smaller physically than most of the other actors, his placement in the far-right middle ground of the frame accentuates his weak position. Again, Gondo moves to the outer edges of the room, seemingly to escape his employee's pleas; then the camera pulls back to show Kawanishi waiting at the door for his instructions. At that moment, Gondo's wife reenters the room to comfort Aoki. Though the scene ends with Gondo still maintaining he will not pay the ransom, Kurosawa's visual placement of characters in the frame foreshadows his change of heart.

Kurosawa puts Gondo back in the center of the frame the following day after he has changed his mind about paying the ransom. No longer master of the universe, he sits

cross-legged on the floor, shoemaker's tools beside him, calmly concealing packets of dye in bags filled with the money for the ransom. As he works, everyone in the living room stops what they are doing to watch him intently. By the end of the scene, Gondo is surrounded by watchers, whose almost religious adoration suggests Gondo as an ethical champion who has reached, in Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro's (2000) words, a "higher level of the humanistic ideal" (306). Interestingly, this is one of the last scenes in which Gondo plays a central role—he won't do so again until the celebrated final prison scene.

If the film ended with Gondo's decision or after the famous train scene in which the boy is rescued, then one could perhaps legitimately claim, as one prominent interpretative strain does, that the film rejects any serious interrogation of class struggle for a "stylistically brilliant yet ideologically reactionary film" (Yoshimoto 2000, 305) in favor of a vision of shared humanity despite class differences. In Nöel Burch's biting words, "Faithful to the ideology that had dominated Kurosawa's work from the very start, this one tells us 'that there is much misery among us, but our police force is excellent'" (Burch 1979, 320; quoted in Yoshimoto 2000, 306). But the film does much more than that. In fact, when Gondo decides to pay the ransom, more than half of the total run time remains, containing both the transitional train scene and the entire ensuing "hell" (*jigoku*) sequence—which takes us from the air-conditioned house on the hill to the world down below as the police conduct their investigation.[2] In this section, we see aspects of how the city is experienced by those without Gondo's resources: it is crowded, dirty, and poor. The stark differences in physical geography and similarities highlighted between Gondo, the kidnapper Takeuchi, and Inspector Tokura (Nakadai Tatsuya) problematize the happy ending suggested by Gondo's choosing to do the right thing at the expense of his family's wellbeing.

High and Low was released at the beginning of Japan's 1960s high-growth era, when Japan's urban areas were in a continual process of remaking themselves following the devastation of World War II. Gone, to some extent, was the "we're all in this together" mentality of the war years and the initial years of reconstruction. The turn toward large-scale industrial capitalism had made new winners and losers, and in the visual architecture of Kurosawa's movie, there is one obvious winner: Gondo. Gondo is an object of scorn and resentment for the kidnapper Takeuchi, who expresses his disdain for the air-conditioned comfort Gondo enjoys while others swelter. Even the police are predisposed to resent the rich Gondo until his actions reveal his ethical nature. Some critics, relying on the commonly held view of Kurosawa as a humanist, have suggested that *High and Low* is Kurosawa's most reactionary film, a position that relies heavily on

the *choices* that the *character* Gondo makes in the film, not the formal and narrative ways in which Kurosawa complicates his position. For example, the ransom drop train scene shows Gondo unsettled and anxious, so unlike the aggressive man of the first part of the film—in which he jokingly tells his son to be like him, an outlaw who attacks first. The change is striking. Further, the tone and setting in the "hell" portion of the film changes from a tense morality play to a police procedural with a variety of indoor and outdoor settings. With this shift in tone and setting, Kurosawa challenges our initial assumption that Gondo is the hero, as he essentially exits the film from this point, appearing only briefly until his major reappearance in the final scene. The intervening scenes in which he does appear show him as a passive receiver of information, such as when the police visit to give him updates, or when shady bankers call in his loans even though the ransom money has already been retrieved.

The film's second half follows the police as they conduct their investigation in the city below. In contrast to the serene physical space of Gondo's house high on the hill, we have a variety of settings in the "hell" portion of the film, most of which are cramped, sweltering, and dirty. Yet these scenes also highlight many hard-working people, including police, dockworkers, and train conductors who appear to take pride in their work, though their work will never accord them the same financial comfort as the work of Gondo, the capitalist. The choice to linger on these scenes suggests a keen awareness of the structural relations between rich and poor.

The "most reactionary film" position is further complicated by Inspector Tokura's decision to arrest Takeuchi on more serious charges once the police find his accomplices dead from a heroin overdose in the kidnapper's hideout. They manufacture a plot that makes it appear that the accomplices are still alive, figuring Takeuchi would try to murder them again. This allows the film to reveal other parts of the "hell" down below, including a crowded and interracial GI bar where Takeuchi purchases uncut heroin, and "Dope Alley," a back street where zombielike addicts promise to do anything for another score. In these consecutive scenes, we see evidence of the unintended consequences of Japan's changing economy, including greater contact with people from outside Japan. The police's eagerness to get Takeuchi on a more serious crime leads to the death of a third person, a female junkie. For Matthew Bernstein (2000), this reveals that "the police remain blind to or unconcerned about the social inequalities that motivate the criminal they track" (183). Capitalist values accord the junkie no worth, but she is in fact a human being whose desires have led to her destruction, a point that Kurosawa takes the time to point out in an already-lengthy film. Moreover, the willingness of the police to go to extreme lengths to

achieve their goals links them to the aggressive character of Gondo when he first appears, as well as the criminal Takeuchi.

At the end of the film, the criminal has been apprehended and will soon be executed, and Gondo has been forced out of National Shoes and has had to start over. Shortly before his execution, Takeuchi requests a meeting with Gondo. The Gondo who visits Takeuchi is a changed man, but problems of class and poverty remain. As Gondo walks down the prison hallway, it is as if he is the one imprisoned: bars behind him, close walls on either side, and a claustrophobic feeling that only intensifies when he enters the part of the prison housing the interview rooms (**Figure 5**). Here, there are bars on either side and Gondo himself is framed behind bars in the foreground. When he enters the small interview room where he will meet Takeuchi, we first see the image of Gondo behind a wire grate, but it is only his reflection. As Takeuchi enters the interview room from his side, Gondo's reflection is partially superimposed upon Takeuchi's, though the images separate briefly when Gondo moves to sit (**Figure 6**). Then Takeuchi moves in the same direction to take his seat and Gondo's reflection is once again partially superimposed on Takeuchi (**Figure 7**). In this way, Kurosawa indicates duality between the two men, how each helps to define the other, as both are doubles of the other. Takeuchi nevertheless defiantly maintains his satisfaction in "making a fortunate man unfortunate," though his body later betrays him when it begins shaking uncontrollably. Gondo's question "Why are you so convinced we must hate each other?" suggests that to some degree he understands Takeuchi's motivation. When he asks Takeuchi if he had really been "so unfortunate," Takeuchi's body begins to shake until he finally breaks down. The gate comes down. The movie ends with Gondo alone, looking at his reflection.

Figure 5: Gondo in the prison. Despite the use of a wide aspect ratio, the shot is claustrophobic, with Gondo trapped behind bars as if imprisoned. *High and Low*, 1963, 2:17:48.

Figure 6: Gondo moves away from Takeuchi to sit down; momentarily his reflection shifts away from Takeuchi. *High and Low*, 1963, 2:18:36.

Figure 7: Takeuchi immediately shifts his body in the same direction as Gondo; once again the reflection is superimposed. *High and Low*, 1963, 2:18:38.

Brilliantly, Kurosawa shifts perspective during this scene, between Gondo's and then Takeuchi's, to intermittently show one as entrapped behind bars even as the reflection of the other is projected onto him. In the combination of Gondo's questions and the cinematography, we see how both men reflect the human condition, and how each has been imprisoned in a particular role by capitalism. Gondo's need to start over after being forced out of National Shoes further shows how a winner can end up a loser. In the words of Stephen Prince (1991), "Kurosawa ensure[s] that the form of the film create[s] a series of shifting perspectives, dialectical in nature, whose movements would disclose the structural relations of wealth and poverty" (181). Gondo does not rail against his position, unlike Takeuchi, who maintains his rage at Gondo even to the moments before his death. Kurosawa's critique of capitalism through the use of a dialectical mode links it to Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*, released almost sixty years later.

Parasite and the Aftermath of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis

Whereas *High and Low* begins as a serious film about a man confronting a moral crisis in which he must decide whether to save his chauffeur's son at the expense of his family, Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* begins as an amusing revenge caper whose protagonists act out against an economic system that has impoverished them. A poor but close-knit family, who live in a cluttered semi-basement apartment in a poor neighborhood, leverage their opportunity to move up in the world after their college-age son Kim Ki-Woo (Choi Woo-shik) is offered a position tutoring the high-school-student daughter of the extremely wealthy Park family while his friend Min (Park Seo-joon) is studying abroad.[3] Ki-woo, who is in his early twenties, has failed the college entrance exam four times. He and his family are unemployed and survive on gig work, like folding pizza boxes for a local chain.

The Kim family's situation is directly related to the consequences of 1997 Asian Financial Crisis in South Korea. To prevent default, the International Monetary Fund provided South Korea with a bank bailout package, which was tied to neoliberal structural reforms. Following the IMF bailout, two million people in South Korea lost jobs and government safety nets were slashed, even as the consumer economy continued to expand. In the decades since, Korea has increasingly shifted to a dual-tier labor market, consisting of "regular workers" and "non-regular workers." Regular workers have relatively good incomes and social safety nets; non-regular workers have significantly lower incomes, no benefits, and no job security. Gig work now accounts for 30%–35% of the total workforce. Wealth and income inequality has grown, while the ideology of nation is still fueled by a capitalist idea of meritocracy. At present, there are high levels of personal debt (with some loans carrying usurious rates), out-of-control housing prices, and high rates of poverty. This suggests that neoliberal economic policies have increasingly taken over and commodified every aspect of people's lives, intensifying a lack of social mobility and concentrating power and wealth within a small but powerful number of elites who seek to maintain control while simultaneously isolating themselves from those who are different. While these conditions are particularly acute in South Korea, the international popularity of *Parasite* suggests its themes of income inequality resonate more broadly

Poor people fall deeper and deeper into debt, while wealthy families become richer and increasingly shielded from the growing poverty around them. Chasing success, poor people have turned to cryptocurrency and high-risk business ventures—in the case of the Kim family, fried chicken and cake franchises—that often fail plunging many into an even worse situation. Reflecting a sense that the game is rigged against them, young people have coined the phrase "Hell Joseon," derived from English 'hell' and

Joseon, a Korean dynasty, suggesting that Korean society is "hellish" as a result of contemporary social and economic policies of South Korea which have led to increased income inequality. This dissatisfaction is frequently thematized in contemporary music, literature, and film; it can be seen in many of Bong's prior films, as well as Yeon Sang-ho's *Train to Busan* (2016) and many songs by K-pop band BTS.[4]

Min decides that Ki-woo would be perfect to take his place as tutor to the Parks' daughter: while not a university student, he speaks English well and won't hit on his student, unlike his college friends. Soon, armed with carefully Photoshopped documents falsely attesting to his credentials, Ki-woo ascends from the depths of Seoul to a modernist mansion atop a hill, carefully concealed behind tall walls, where he meets the Park family, consisting of a stay-at-home mother, a businessman father, a teenage girl, and a boy in elementary school, along with their live-in housekeeper. Mr. Park (Lee Sun-kyun) is not an industrial capitalist like Gondo in the earlier Japanese film but rather the CEO of a tech company, reflecting how real wealth in the twenty-first century lies in the control of data, not in the creation of goods and other commodities.

Whereas the Kim children appear to be from the "dirt spoon" class, to use a term from South Korea's unofficial "Spoon Class Theory"—those with low incomes and no financial assets to speak of. By contrast, the Park children belong to the "golden spoon" class, or the 1%, in terms of income and assets who benefit from their family's extensive resources.[5] Despite their wealth, the Parks seem alienated from each other, contrasting with the close-knit Kims. There are suggestions that the Kims were not always poor but are failed members of the middle class. A brief mention of the family's unsuccessful fried chicken and Taiwanese castella franchises[6] suggests the father, Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho), lost a permanent position and spent his severance or savings on high risk get-rich-quick schemes. Ki-taek comments that entry-level jobs receive 500 or more applicants, further hinting that their insecure financial situation is not unusual. Despite being smart and resourceful, there's every indication that they will never get ahead.

Mrs. Park (Cho Yeo-jeong), described as "simple" by Min, isn't interested in checking Ki-woo's credentials, content to rely on a personal recommendation from the former tutor. Clearly, for her, it is not a matter of what you know but who you know, a domestic sort of cronyism. While she insists on sitting in on Ki-woo's first lesson, her vetting stops there. She also tells Ki-woo that her rambunctious young son, Da-song (who is obsessed with Native Americans), is an artist by nature who needs a new tutor. Almost immediately, we see how wrong Min's opinion of Ki-Woo was. Ki-woo, now known to the Parks as Kevin, introduces his sister "Jessica" (Park So-dam) as an acquaintance who could serve as art therapist to Da-song and he secretly begins dating the daughter, Da-hye (Jung Ji-so).

Jessica, whose real name is Ki-jung, orchestrates the next move by leaving her panties in Mr. Park's car, thus setting up his driver. When Mr. Park discovers them, he assumes his driver has crossed some unassailable line and had sex with a drug-addicted prostitute in the backseat. When Ki-jung "learns" of this infraction, she recommends her father Ki-taek, whom she describes as her cousins' former driver, for the vacant position. All that is left for the Kims is to replace the Parks' long-standing housekeeper Moon-gwang (Lee Jung-eun) with Chung-sook (Jang Hye-jin), the Park family mother. Moon-gwang had originally worked for the architect who designed the house and stayed on after it was sold to the Park family. This seemingly throwaway observation that Moon-gwang is, in a sense, the house's original occupant figures heavily into the film's complicating action in the second half of the film, when viewers learn of the hidden basement. The Kim family orchestrates her firing through an ingenious ruse involving a peach, hot sauce, and a smart phone camera, leaving the Park family to believe that Moon-gwang is suffering from infectious tuberculosis. The Parks' fear of infection and "crossing the line" (to use a phrase Mr. Park frequently employs) ensures the Kims' ruse will work. In a montage lasting about five minutes, we see the Kim family at the top of their game. They first assess their foe, learn her weakness (a dangerous peach allergy), and then exploit it. Set to a classical music piece with Vivaldi-like overtones, the montage cuts between the Parks' house and garden and various locations in the city down below. The tension picks up once a flashback shows the father practicing a script written by Ki-Woo about a phone call he allegedly overheard. "I heard her say she was diagnosed with active tuberculosis," Ki-taek says in flashback, as Ki-Woo, playing the role of director, tells him to tone down his emotions. This is quickly followed to a cut to the inside of the Parks' car, with Mrs. Park in the back seat with a shocked look on her face. The *coup de grace* comes when Mrs. Park "sees" evidence of her housekeeper's illness. Ki-jung, having received a text from her father indicating their ETA, goes downstairs and flicks peach fuzz onto the housekeeper's neck. The music soars as Mrs. Park and Ki-taek steadily move from the garage up the stairs to the main part of the house where the housekeeper is coughing violently. With every cough, Mrs. Park's expression shows increasing disgust and dread. Bong then cuts back to the family practicing the plan in their semi-basement apartment. Ki-taek is shaking a packet of hot sauce as Ki-woo says it would be the icing on the cake. The montage returns to the Parks' house to show Ki-taek moving steadily across the room and surreptitiously squirting blood-red hot sauce on a tissue, which he then holds up, a pained expression on his face (**Figure 8**). This montage, however, is the last example of the Kims performing so expertly.

Figure 8: The culmination of the montage in which Moon-gwang the housekeeper is fired. Ki-taek looks back sadly at Mrs. Park as he holds up the "bloodstained" tissue. *Parasite*, 2019, 44:32.

Though each member of the Kim family now holds a well-paying service position in the Park household, which they have each stepped into ably through a combination of intelligence, skill, and forgery, they will soon learn their success is an illusion. This lesson is accomplished through the introduction of a *lower* lower class and a hidden bunker deep beneath the Park family's beautiful home. In what ensues, the brutal way the Kims fight to maintain their success challenges our opinion of them as comic heroes, lovable losers who have found success through trickery. This problematizes questions of identity and difference, the nature of neoliberal capitalism, and our own complicit behavior within the economic system.

The shift begins with the Kim family having an impromptu party at the Parks' house, with the Parks celebrating Da-Song's birthday on an overnight camping excursion. As the Kims eat and drink the Parks' food and make themselves at home, they imagine they are now the owners and masters of the Parks' house. Notably, they don't want a different system (or perhaps simply cannot imagine one) but only wish to maintain their improved position. Just at that moment, the midpoint of the film, the doorbell rings. The intercom camera reveals the former housekeeper, almost hysterical and a bedraggled shadow of her former prim and proper self, begging to retrieve something from the basement, whose entrance always appears as a dark gaping hole in the otherwise brightly lit house (**Figure 9**). Reluctantly, Chung-sook lets her in while the others hide. When Moon-gwang doesn't return from the basement, Chung-sook goes down to find her struggling to move a large cabinet. Chung-sook assists, revealing stairs leading down to a second basement deep below the house. Hidden in a bunker is Moon-gwang's husband, Geun-sae, who has secretly been living there to hide from loan sharks. The combination of the stuck door and Moon-Gwang's firing means he hasn't eaten for days.

Figure 9: Moon-gwang in front of the gaping black entrance to the basement. *Parasite*, 2019, 1:05:20.

By introducing the second basement, Bong complicates the easy dichotomy of high and low, while also introducing the idea of the return of the repressed in the form of the hidden poor who are sometimes made visible. He also returns to and intensifies the idea in Kurosawa's film that the boundaries between high and low are closer than one thinks. And it is here that the film's struggle really begins, not poor against rich, or even rich against poor (since the rich have the power of the state, the economy, and the police, and thus usually prevail), but poor against poor. Rather than recognizing their similarities and working together with Moon-gwae and her husband, the Kims fight to keep what little they have. When the rest of the Kims tumble into sight down the stairs, Moon-gwae instantly realizes they have been conning the Park family. She abandons her calls for solidarity and begins taking video and threatening to expose them. Whereas technology in *High and Low* is used in a mostly positive way and deployed by police to catch the kidnapper, technology is more problematic in *Parasite*. The Kims have stolen Wi-Fi, forged documents, and communicated their plots by text message, and now technology may be their downfall.[7]

When the Kims next return to the surface level, they have lost control. They huddle with their hands up in a corner while Moon-gwang gives her husband a massage. Gleefully, Guen-sae points the camera at them, saying, "This send button is like a missile launcher. If we threaten to push it those people can't do anything" (**Figure 10**). Unexpectedly, Ki-taek throws himself at Geun-sae, sending the phone flying. A desperate struggle for the phone ensues. Suddenly the house phone rings. It is Mrs. Park, informing Chung-sook they had been rained out of their camping excursion, are

Figure 10: Moon-gwang and her husband threaten to expose the Kims. *Parasite*, 2019, 1:12:55.

only a few minutes away from home, and want to eat *chapaguri* noodles.[8] What follows is another hectic scene, as the Kims attempt to subdue their opponents, put the house back in order, and have the *chapaguri* prepared by the time the Parks return. Each Kim approaches their task with utter determination in a way that reveals an unpleasant side to their character. By the end of the scene, the comedic vein present at the beginning of the film is gone, replaced with a deadly seriousness, as Bong raises the stakes for all involved except the Parks, who remain blissfully unaware any of this is happening until just before the end. Thus, the last half of *Parasite* feels almost like a different film, like *High and Low* before it, with its shift from a caper to a story of bleak and violent class struggle.

Just as the Parks walk through the door, Chung-sook sees Moon-gwae at the entrance to the cellar and knocks her back down the stairs without a moment's hesitation. This spontaneous act of violence sets into motion the final tragic act of the movie. In the Kim family members' willingness to protect their recently acquired financial security at any cost, we see dog-eat-dog capitalist impulses at their worst, without the sheen of class exuded by the Parks. While audience sympathy has been squarely with the plucky and resourceful—however parasitic to the wealthy Parks—Kims to this point, now it begins to waver as we begin to question their complicity in maintaining the capitalist system. The Parks meanwhile remain oblivious to the class drama that is playing out in their house.

Somewhat later, Mr. and Mrs. Park lounge on their couch, looking out at the backyard, where their son Da-Song has set up the tepee that usually sits in his bedroom. The camera pans down to Ki-taek and his children trapped under the coffee table, a

visual representation of the interrelationship between high and low (**Figure 11**). As they lie on the couch, Mr. Park awkwardly fondles his wife and talks about Ki-taek's odor, a smell like boiling rags or old radishes he has also noticed on the subway.[9] Beneath the table, Ki-taek surreptitiously sniffs his shirt. Park then returns to his abiding concern: an invisible line between himself and his employees that should never be crossed. He continues, "Anyways, even though [Ki-taek] always seems to be about to cross the line, he never does cross it. That's good. I'll give him credit. But that smell crosses the line, it powers right through, right into the back seat." At these words, Ki-taek's face grows tense as he realizes how Park sees him: not an equal, but something other. While Mr. Park's frequent reference to "crossing the line" speaks more to his own class anxiety than Ki-taek's, here the message hits home: Ki-taek and his family are deluding themselves into thinking they have finally made it. But it should be also noted that here in their awkward seduction scene, as Mr. and Mrs. Park take on the roles of chauffeur and drug-addicted prostitute, getting intimate in view of their son in the back yard, the Parks themselves are *playing at* crossing the line.

Figure 11: "High and low" in the same frame. Mr. Park lies on the couch while the Kim family hide under the coffee table. *Parasite*, 2019, 1:27:27.

Eventually Ki-taek and his children escape the Park family home. A lengthy scene shows them making their way in silence down through the city in torrential rains, down stairs, through tunnels, and back to their own working-class neighborhood, which is completely flooded (**Figure 12**). Just as the act of ascending stairs in the first part of the film symbolizes their aspirations of upward mobility, now each step downward literalizes the futility of their fantasy. The music becomes more ominous the closer they

Figure 12: The Kim family descends to the poor part of the city. *Parasite*, 2019, 1:32:33.

get to their apartment. In the flooded apartment, each retrieves something of value: for Ki-taek, it's a medal for athletics his wife once won. For Ki-jung, it's a cigarette, which she smokes on the toilet as sewage spews from beneath the lid, perhaps suggesting that for her, at least, their dreams have simultaneously gone up in smoke and gone to shit. For Ki-Joo, it's the scholar's stone, a gift from his friend Min that supposedly represents good fortune but instead seems to represent the ultimate futility of hope for people, like the Kims, who are trapped within the false meritocracy—that those with skill, intellect, and desire will get ahead—of capitalism. Instead, the deck is stacked in favor of those who already have more. As ominous music plays in the background, the film cuts between the Kims' flooded semi-basement apartment and a badly injured Moon-gwang and her husband in the bunker beneath the Park family home, showing the connection between the two families. She tells him she was hurt by Chung-sook ("that nice woman"), imploring him to remember her name. Appearing to have lost his last bit of sanity, we next see Geun-sae signaling for help in Morse code with the lights in the house.[10]

The next morning dawns sunny and clear. Oblivious to all that has happened, Mrs. Park begins planning an impromptu trauma recovery party for her son, on account of his birthday excursion being ruined by the rain. Unlike the Kims' impromptu party the previous evening, which made do with food and drink already present in the house, Mrs. Park's will involve a great deal of shopping and hiring of waiters and cooks. Each member of the Kim family is called on to participate (for extra pay, of course); when they take the calls, Ki-taek, Ki-woo, and Ki-jung are in a gymnasium crowded with other flood evacuees. While less than excited to satisfy the Parks' demands on this day, the

Kims do not assert their own autonomy or show any desire to end the parasitical cycle; instead, they step back into their assigned roles: Ki-jung as successful art therapist, Ki-woo as tutor, and Ki-taek as chauffeur, accompanying Mrs. Park as she completes her shopping for the impromptu party. Chung-sook, as housekeeper, shoulders the real labor involved in hosting this party as she hoists some ten wooden tables from the basement, which Mrs. Park asks her to lay out in a crane's-wing formation with Da-Song's tepee at the center[11] for an elaborate feast. As Ki-taek follows Mrs. Park around upscale markets as she shops for her "impromptu" party, we see in his increasingly gloomy face a growing awareness of his recognition of his lowly position. But he is not the only one in his family who has come to feel a heightened sense of class awareness. Ki-woo has taken the scholar's stone to the Park's house, apparently planning to kill Moon-gwang and Guen-sae.[12] While this may seem out of character, his potential turn to violence is foreshadowed in an earlier scene when he grabs the stone when confronting a drunk urinating in front of the family's window. Having a plan, however, distinguishes him from his hapless father who had told him the night before, when they were lying shoulder-to-shoulder on the gym floor, that the best plan is no plan, since it's the only plan that never fails. Ki-woo's plan ultimately fails as well, as we soon see him struggling with Guen-sae and then being bashed over the head with his own scholar's stone.

Ki-taek, meanwhile, has been enlisted by Mr. Park, at Mrs. Park's request, to play the role of a "bad Indian," complete with a Native American warbonnet. They are to attack "Jessica" as she brings the cake to Da-Song, allowing him, playing a "good Indian," to rescue her. When Ki-taek says to Mr. Park, "You're trying your best, too. Well, you love her, after all," he implies that Mr. Park's willingness to do things to make his wife happy confirms for Ki-taek that he has affection for his wife. Mr. Park rebuffs Ki-taek's overture, saying, "Remember I am paying you overtime," since to acknowledge his comment would be to humanize Ki-taek. Ki-taek's face falls at yet another indication of the invisible but impenetrable line Mr. Park sees between them.

As Ki-jung walks toward Da-song in his tepee, cake in hand, a crazed Geun-sae rushes out to avenge his wife's death and stabs her in the chest with a knife he has stolen from the kitchen. Da-Song recognizes the assailant as the "ghost" he had once seen and faints.[13] As they struggle, Chung-sook wrests free of party attendees attempting to hold her back and attacks Geun-sae just as the two fathers reach their children. Mr. Park grabs Da-Song and runs toward the driveway. As Ki-taek attempts to staunch the blood from Ki-jung's chest wound, he looks, dazed, to see Da-hye coming into the garden with a bloodied Ki-woo on her back, attempting to carry him to safety. In another corner of the garden, Chung-sook is still fighting for her life. Bong cuts to Mr. Park calling for

his driver, then back to Ki-taek, whose attempts to stop the bleeding aren't working. Not abandoning his mortally wounded daughter, Ki-taek tosses the keys toward Mr. Park just as Chung-sook and Geun-sae fall on top of them, Geun-sae still stabbing at Chung-sook with the stolen kitchen knife. Grabbing a skewer of grilled meat from the ground, she plunges it into his side.

Ki-taek stares as Mr. Park grimaces and holds his nose while reaching under Geun-sae's body for the keys (**Figure 13**). His grimace recalls the overheard conversation about Ki-taek's smell, which drives home for Ki-taek how disposable he is—how similar, in fact, he is to people like Geun-sae. Realizing that he will never cross the invisible line—which is to say, receive recognition from Mr. Park—Ki-taek angrily erupts and stabs Mr. Park to death. In many respects, his act of violence sets him apart from the other characters whose violent acts are grounded in the desire to gain or regain certain perceived advantages. Ki-taek, now fully aware of his place in the world, refuses to bend to Mr. Park's will. In this act of protest, he becomes like Takeuchi in *High and Low*, meaning he gives in to his resentment, though he had no conscious awareness of it before the previous day. In the ensuing confusion following his attack, Ki-taek retreats into the secret underground bunker. The film ends with Ki-taek still trapped in the basement of the house on the hill, which is now owned by a German family of essentially the same social and economic class as the Parks. Ki-jung is dead, and Ki-woo, now recovered from his head wound, and his mother have been absolved of involvement in the death of Mr. Park, though they have been convicted of fraud.

Figure 13: Mr. Park grimaces and holds his nose at Geun-sae's smell. *Parasite*, 2019, 1:55:09.

At the end of the film, Ki-woo has realized that his father is alive and hiding in the second basement of the Park's house, having decoded a Morse code message his father sent using the lights of the house, just like Geun-sae before him. Ki-woo has

also decided on a rescue plan: he will work hard, become rich, and buy the house for him and his mother, making it possible for his father to ascend from the sub-basement to freedom. Bong reveals glimpses of this unlikely future through prolepsis. Although Ki-woo has lost almost everything, he seems not to have lost hope in the cruelest fantasy of all: that capitalism is a meritocracy that will benefit all who work and play by its rules. The scene where he imagines his reunion with his father shows Ki-woo in the same half-basement apartment where the film started, still trapped by the fantasy of moving up in the world.

Doubles, Opposites, Stairs, and Lines

Both *High and Low* and *Parasite* employ a dialectic that reveals the closeness in the dichotomy of high and low, but *Parasite* is a more overtly dark film. Takeuchi, the villain of *High and Low*, remains the villain throughout, notwithstanding the similarities Kurosawa draws between him, Gondo, the police in their attempt to entrap the kidnapper, the executives, and bankers. In *Parasite*, there is no clear villain other than the capitalist system itself. The poor either fail to see their shared class interests or actively try to subdue the other while the rich remain blissfully unaware of their responsibility for the unequal dynamic of capitalism until the moment Ki-taek flips out and attacks Mr. Park. While all three families in the story are destroyed by the film's end, the system remains. Nowhere is there an attempt to overthrow the system, a solution Bong explores in the film *Snowpiercer* (2013) about survivors on a train that circumnavigates the world following the advent of a new ice age. Bong does not really challenge the system in this film. Richard Brody (2019), writing in *The New Yorker*, calls *Parasite* "essentially a conservative movie," one "neither nihilistic nor utopian, neither revolutionary nor visionary," concluding that the movie "falls far short of greatness is its inability to contend with society and existence at large—or with its own conservative aesthetic; it doesn't risk disrupting its own schema in pursuit of more drastic experiences and ideas." In *Parasite*, the Kims—aside from Ki-taek with his late epiphany—fail to see that their low economic position is, in some respect, a consequence of what has been gained by the rich. However, their choice to fight to change their role within the system that oppresses them seems far more attainable than revolution.

On a narrative level, *High and Low* has a more comforting ending than *Parasite*: at the end of the film, Gondo *is* a new man, forged in the trials of the previous months; he understands the systemic nature of capitalism and, if his calm exterior is an indicator, appears to have some empathy for Takeuchi and people like him who lash out against the system. Kurosawa complicates the idea of a happy (or happy-ish) ending by his technical and stylistic choices throughout the film, thus forcing us to look more closely

at the violence that lies at the heart of capitalism. *Parasite* offers little solace on either the narrative or formal level. Thus, both films consider the violence that lies at the heart of capitalism and the resultant societal and class inequalities. Kurosawa and Bong respectively accomplish this by using doubles, and opposites and lines.

The primary device used in *High and Low* is that of the double, on both the narrative and formal level. As already mentioned, Kurosawa draws out similarities between Takeuchi, Gondo, and Inspector Tokura to reveal them as individuals who will aggressively pursue their interests, which challenges—on some levels—Takeuchi's status as the film's villain. But they aren't the only examples: The children Jun and Shin'ichi are presented as doubles throughout, including swapping roles while playing sheriff and outlaw (**Figure 14**). Their physical resemblance is so close even Gondo's wife confuses them. Gondo and Aoki, the chauffeur, appear as opposites, both in their physical stature and their relative positions, with Aoki subordinate to Gondo. These doubles serve to undercut the stark dualities of high and low, rich and poor, good and evil. The final scene, in which first Gondo's image and then Takeuchi's are superimposed upon each other, is the most powerful way that Kurosawa undercuts any reading of the ending as a comfortable resolution. In Takeuchi's impassioned scream is the coalescence of all the tension established in the film. According to Yoshimoto (2000), "the motif of the double becomes so explicit that the hero and the villain can be interpreted as two conflicting aspects of the split subject instead of two autonomous individuals" (327). It is in this split subject that one can sense the incommensurability and absurdity at the heart of modern life's capitalist turn.

Figure 14: In this scene, we are introduced to Jun and Shin'ichi and their game of sheriff and outlaw. Here, Gondo asserts his similarity to outlaws, but what most comes across is the striking physical similarity between the two boys. *High and Low*, 1963, 12:14.

By contrast, Bong primarily uses stairs and lines as metaphors for class inequality in South Korea. The use of space to indicate the separate spheres of rich and poor, inspired by *High and Low*, is intensified by the foregrounding of stairs in the film. The Kims live *down* in a poor neighborhood, in an apartment partially below street level at the dead end of a street, their primary window looking out onto the urban jungle. By contrast, the Parks reside far above them, almost at the peak of one of Seoul's many hills, and to enter the house, one must pass through a gate and climb up through the garden or through a stairway from the garage. Their large picture windows look out at a beautiful garden that is closed off from the external world. The Kims' rise in social status, their "climbing the social ladder," is made visible in this visual metaphor. So is their fall in the scene when Ki-taek, Ki-jung, and Ki-woo walk down into and through the city in the pouring rain. Stairs also make visible the struggle between poor families once the second basement is discovered. Notably, the bunker is at least three stories beneath the cellar, well beneath street level. Whereas stairs help to separate rich from poor, the stairs are also the site of violence. Once the Kims are outed as con artists, they fight with Moon-gwang and her husband for control of the stairs—that is, for the ability to climb to a better social and economic position. In the struggles that follow, at least one member of each family is pushed or pulled down the stairs, a visual metaphor for the poor rising only on the backs of others.

Bong takes a similar approach in his use of lines. The story starts with the Kims, by dint of their street smarts, beginning to cross the line from poverty to a more secure existence. But the lines present early in the film suggest how difficult it really is to cross that line: when members of the Kim family are together with the Parks in their home, they are frequently visually separated from them by a vertical line that runs through the frame. The lines are naturally occurring elements of the *mise en scene*, like the side of a refrigerator, or the edge of a wall (**Figure 15**). But it is not just the Kims who face lines. On the day of Ki-woo's first meeting with the family, he watches through the dining room window as Moon-gwang wakes a sleeping Mrs. Park, her head resting on a garden table. When she doesn't respond, Moon-gwang reaches forward and claps her hands to wake her. The presentation of Ki-woo's view of them places them on opposite sides of a vertical line formed by a vertical seam in the window, except when Moon-gwang crosses it to wake her employer. And when Kim Ki-taek first meets Mr. Park at his workplace, Mr. Park sits in an office separated from Ki-taek by a nearly invisible glass partition. This metaphor, which suggests both visual porosity and impermeability, intensifies the contrast between the rich and poor in the film.

Bong's use of Native American imagery combined with his use of lines provides an interesting interpretative possibility that links it to the outlaw and sheriff imagery in

Figure 15: Vertical lines often separate the "lower" characters from those in a higher social position. *Parasite*, 2019, 14:48.

High and Low. Da-song's obsession with Native Americans is clear from Ki-woo's first visit to the house. Toy arrows are strewn throughout the living areas, and Da-song himself first appears wearing a feather headband and has a tepee ("We ordered it from America"). The Parks appropriate these images as decoration without regard to the tragic history of Native American genocide. These images resonate symbolically with the themes of the film, which Bong has confirmed in numerous interviews. A sort of genocide ensues once the Kims, who have infiltrated the Parks' house, discover one of its "original residents"—Guen-sae, who happens to be Da-song's "ghost"—living in the basement.

While Bong makes strong use of lines, he also uses reflections. Most poignantly, reflections figure in a scene shortly before the tragic events of the party scene. Ki-woo has just kissed Da-hye in her bedroom, but his mind seems elsewhere, which she picks up on. She is shown reflected in the glass window, one image outside, as if with her family, and the other inside with Ki-woo. The camera then pans to show Ki-woo in the same manner. Here, though, it seems to underscore how impossible his dream of marrying Da-hye is (**Figure 16**). As he suspects, he doesn't fit into the Park household, despite Da-hye's assurance that he does. That she looks directly at him while he looks out the window at his disappearing dream perhaps suggests she hasn't yet fully internalized her father's idea of invisible but insurmountable lines between classes.

Both *High and Low* and *Parasite* are films based around extended metaphors for class stratification that reveal the parasitical interdependence between the rich and poor in capitalist societies. Whereas *High and Low* uses both formal and narrative doubles to problematize "the identities of extreme opposites" (Yoshimoto 2000, 310), Bong's film focuses on the parasitic relation itself. In biology, a parasite is an organism that lives on

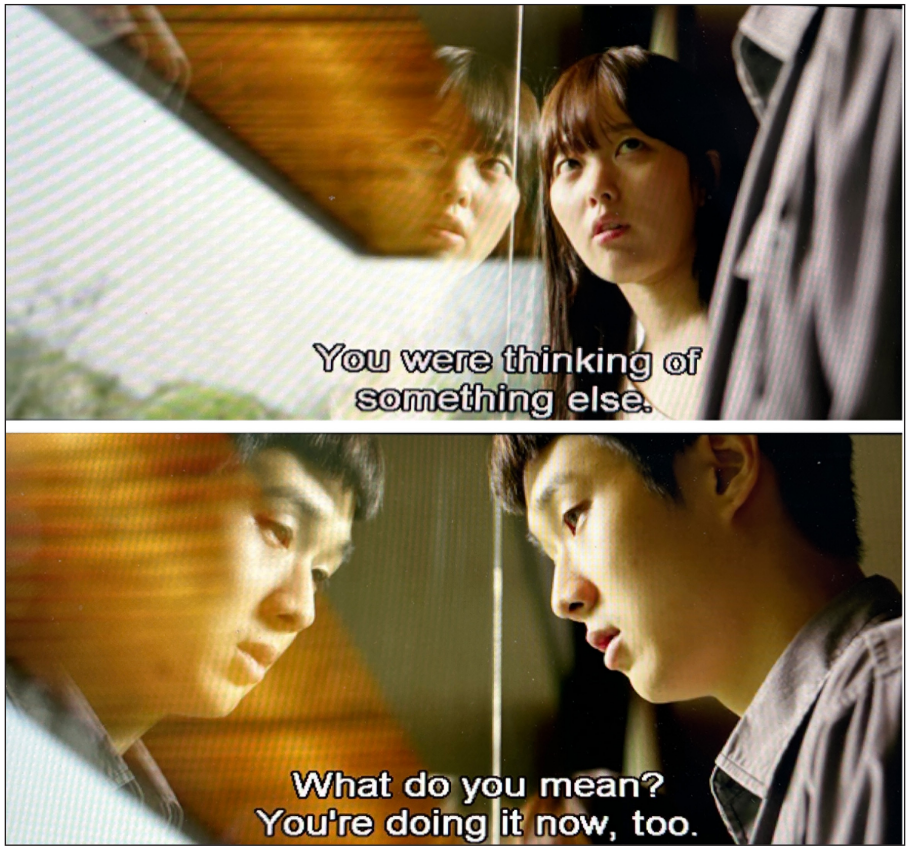

Figure 16: Da-hye and Ki-woo reflected in the upstairs window. The reflection and the line in the glass shows that Ki-woo marrying Da-hye is an impossibility, a permanent line that cannot be crossed. *Parasite*, 2019, 1:46:00.

or inside a host organism, causing it some harm. While a simple analysis might suggest that the Kim family are the parasites, the presence of the second and poorer level of "parasites" in the basement and—hidden in plain sight—the Park family themselves, who benefit from others' labor in big and small ways, problematize the capitalist system itself.[14] And yet, in the final scene, though the Parks have been displaced, following the death of Mr. Park, the film suggests a never-ending cycle of wealth and poverty, and the illusion of meritocracy through Ki-woo's pipe dream of buying the house where his father is trapped. Moreover, even if Ki-taek could come back to the surface, he would still be trapped within a prison. In both films, the verticality of success highlights the equally tragic endings. While Gondo the individual can start over, the problems of systemic inequality continue to exist and be ignored, and the actions of Takeuchi and the poor in *Parasite* are flattened to the criminal acts of individuals, rather than broader cries for help.

Notes

[1] The similarities between *High and Low* and *Parasite* are not accidental. Bong considers *High and Low* his favorite Kurosawa film and cites its use of space as an inspiration. This can be found in the DVD commentary to *Parasite* (Bong 2019) and the documentary *Kurosawa's Way* (Cadou 2011).

[2] While many films follow a three-act structure adapted from the theater (set-up, confrontation, and resolution), *High and Low* is divided into two major parts: the crime section, which is presented almost like a theatrical play set in the "heaven" of Gondo's home, and the "hell" section, which is primarily a police procedural and uses settings from around the Yokohama region. Between them is the transitional ransom drop scene, which takes place on a Kodama Express train.

[3] In 1970, political tensions with North Korea led to a mandate that all dwellings needed to have a basement which could be used as an emergency shelter in case of bombing. These underground spaces were not to be used as residences. Within a few years, rising rents led to the widespread creation of semi-basement apartments, as seen in *Parasite*. Estimates state that there are between 200,000 and 220,000 semi-basement apartments as of 2020. Following the recent drowning of three residents of such apartments following torrential downpours, the Seoul government has decided to phase them out. However, landlords will have up to twenty years to remove them from the rental market (McCurry 2022). For additional information on substandard urban housing in Korea, see Lee and Han 2023.

[4] For more about the Korean labor market, see Schauer 2018. For more about "Hell Jeoseon," see Lewis 2023.

[5] For more on spoon class theory and income inequality in South Korea, see "Spoon Class Theory" 2016, Chen 2019, and Lee 2018.

[6] It is perhaps significant to note that when Kim Ki-taek learns his sub-basement counterpart had a castella franchise that failed, his expression looks rueful, as if he recognizes the similarity between himself and the other.

[7] This begins humorously, with early scenes of the Kims trying to find an unlocked Wi-Fi signal and demonstrating their facility with Photoshop and other computer programs to falsify credentials. But it is also noteworthy that Mr. Park's fortune comes from the tech industry, a symbol of late capitalism, in contrast to Gondo, whose fortune comes from industrial production. Here, in this scene, the ease with which compromising photographs and films can be shared threatens the Kim family, the inverse of how they wielded technology to get the former housekeeper fired.

[8] *Chapaguri*, or *ramdon* in the English subtitles, is Korean comfort food. The word is a portmanteau indicating a hybrid instant noodle dish consisting of two types of instant noodles. One type is Chapaghetti, "spaghetti"-type noodles with black bean sauce; the other, "Neoguri" is udon-style noodles with a spicy sauce. Here, the wealthy Kims put a spin on a popular instant noodle dish by asking that it be cooked with chunks of an expensive cut of steak. Bong has suggested that even this food choice illustrates class tensions in the film: *chapaguri* instant noodles "is something kids like, regardless of the rich or poor . . . but the rich wife couldn't stand her kids to eat this noodle, so she adds sirloin topping" (quoted in Rochlin 2019). In the way that life imitates art, thousands of *Parasite*-style *chapaguri* noodle recipes can now be found on the internet (for example, see Coughlin 2020), and *chapaguri* has even found its way onto the menu of some Korean restaurants in New York City, where I live. In another interesting twist, Mrs. Park offers Chung-sook some *chapaguri* when her family members refuse to eat it; she then proceeds to eat the whole bowl herself.

[9] It should be noted that smell appears as a dividing line between high and low classes multiple times in *Parasite*. Interestingly, only the son, Da-song, notices that every one of his family's new employees smell the same.

[10] Earlier in the film, whenever the father is seen walking up the stairs into the main living area, lights above his head illuminate as he approaches them, leaving the audience (and the Parks, actually) to assume them to be motion activated. However, in one of the sub-basement scenes, Ki-taek learns that Moon-gwang's husband turns on the lights for the husband as a show of respect, while also using them to transmit messages in Morse code, which he believes Da-song might get. In a cross-cut scene, we also learn that Da-Song's earlier "ghost" sighting was actually the result of Moon-gwang's husband coming up from his sub-basement hideaway and startling the boy.

[11] The crane's-wing formation was famously used by Admiral Yi Sun-sin in the Battle of Hansan Island (1592), during the Japanese invasions of Korea (Imjin War, 1592–1598), when Toyotomi Hideyoshi set out to conquer the Korean peninsula and China. Admiral Yi commanded his ships to appear as if they were retreating and then turn back to attack the Japanese fleet, and Yi's forces destroyed most of the enemy ships, leading to Japanese defeat. Note, however, in this film, the crane's-wing formation surrounds Da-song's tepee, a visual representation of the "American Indian," the indigenous people of North America, a great many of whom were killed or displaced in the westward expansion of settlers.

[12] Of the four Kims, Chung-sook and Ki-jung seem more willing to resolve their struggles with Moon-gwang and her husband through a financial arrangement. Just before the party begins, Chung-sook gives Ki-jung some food to take down to the basement, but Ki-jung is called away by Mrs. Park. Of course, by this time, Moon-gwang is already dead.

[13] The presence of the "ghost" and the hidden second basement link *Parasite* with the modern gothic, a mode that explores the urban present to uncover the ghosts beneath the surface.

[14] There is maybe a smart auditory pun in the name of the film and the Kim family names, all of which—with the exception of Chung-sook—start with the syllable *ki* (기), mirroring the first syllable in the Korean title, *Gisaengchung*.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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