

Arbitrary Reality: The Global Art Cinema of Jim Jarmusch

By

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Abstract

The cinema of American filmmaker Jim Jarmusch resists many attempts at categorization. This thesis examines Jarmusch's cinema within the context of both American independent cinema studies and global art cinema studies. This is accomplished by considering Jarmusch's independent cinema as an intersection between the two areas and by linking the global to the singular case of Jarmusch. The periodization of this study is between 1980 and 2009 when Jarmusch's feature film production illustrates a conscious engagement with global art cinema. The details of how his films were financed, exhibited, and distributed, and the development of the contemporary American independent cinema scene during this time, help to establish both Jarmusch's independence and his alignment with global art cinema. The industrial framework Jarmusch established provides an economic structure that sustains his work to the present. Textual analysis of the films *Dead Man* (1995), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (2000), *Broken Flowers* (2005), and *The Limits of Control* (2009), reveals an approach to mise-en-scene and narrative that corresponds more closely with global art cinema than with most Hollywood films. Further, analysis of the cultural and ideological perspectives represented by these films demonstrates a critical engagement with questions of intercultural interaction and the potential benefits of the transcultural exchange of artistic production. By looking at the particular case of Jarmusch, this study addresses both the strengths and limitations of broad categories, such as American independent cinema and global art cinema, recognized and discussed by scholars, filmmakers, and general audiences, for understanding an individual filmmaker.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The image fades to black. Over the black screen arrives the sound of a person's shoes ambling casually on pavement. A white-lettered title card appears: "The New World." The image fades to a black and white, low angle shot, framed from just above knee-level. A suitcase, and then the carrier of the suitcase, a young woman, enter the frame from the right. From the previous scene, we know the young woman has arrived from Budapest today, so we're mildly surprised when, stopping in center frame, she removes a cassette player from her bag and plays a witchy American blues song, "I Put a Spell on You" by Screamin' Jay Hawkins. She resumes walking, and the frame, after waiting patiently for her shadow to exit, fades to black again while the sounds of footsteps and Screamin' Jay continue. The image returns, now a tracking shot from the woman's side as she walks past commercial trucks, a gas station, and a corrugated door marked by graffiti: "U.S. OUT OF EVERYWHERE YANKEE GO HOME." Fade to black again.

This sequence occurs early in Jim Jarmusch's 1984 film *Stranger Than Paradise*. Together with the black leader, the two shots described above last nearly two minutes. The long takes, the recurrence of the fade outs into black leader, and the black and white cinematography immediately mark this film as something different from almost any other American film to receive such critical attention and (relative) commercial success during this period. Add to these factors the subtle humor, a Hungarian immigrant central character, a piecemeal production history, and an idiosyncratic perspective on American culture, and it makes sense that the film's poster boldly heralded this otherwise understated work from a virtual unknown as "A New

American Film.” In the lower right hand corner of the poster is the seal of the Cannes Film Festival, where *Stranger Than Paradise* had won the Camera d’Or for best first feature. In the center-left portion of the poster is a quote from reviewer Sheila Benson of the *Los Angeles Times*: “...A very, very funny film which resists rational description as strongly as it resists pigeonholing.” Thus the appeal made by the poster is twofold. With the Cannes seal, it catches the attention of those who recognize Cannes as a symbol of “art” in cinema. And with the emphasis on a new *American* film that is difficult to describe and categorize, it seems to address an international audience, or perhaps an American audience dissatisfied with the then contemporary state of most mainstream Hollywood films.

Throughout his career, the American independent filmmaker Jim Jarmusch has compiled a body of work that consistently traverses a variety of boundaries and also challenges attempts at categorization. While his films cannot be neatly situated as experimental, they are equally difficult to define as mainstream. While Jarmusch’s films can often be seen as embodying certain features of various traditional genres, these generic features are typically stripped to the bone, minimized to a point of irrelevance, or reconfigured in non-traditional ways that challenge generic expectations. Jarmusch is commonly spoken of as an auteur, yet the application of authorship may be most important in that it creates a recognizable brand by which he can secure financing for his resolutely independent, small-budget demands. Finally, and perhaps most intriguingly, while they often address issues relating to American culture and values, his films are often made with non-American actors or characters, with financing from non-American sources, and in foreign locations, and the formal approach and critical stance they take have more in common with much international art cinema than with Hollywood. The press book for *Stranger Than Paradise* seems to emphasize this quality, as Jarmusch describes the film as a

“semi-neorealist black-comedy in the style of an imaginary Eastern-European film director obsessed with Ozu and familiar with the 1950’s American television show ‘The Honeymooners’” (Merritt 321).

For all of the above reasons, it seems natural that Jarmusch and his films are situated by scholars as “independent” within the context of American cinema. In terms of production, on the one hand, Jarmusch relies primarily on his reputation as an artist, not on the promise of significant commercial potential, to secure financing and distribution deals which allow him to retain complete control of his work. In fact, he retains ownership of the negatives of his films, and thus final cut and distributional authorization. On the other hand, in terms of mise-en-scene and thematic content, his films implicitly and explicitly undermine or critique generic expectations, experiment with form, and represent lifestyles and/or cultures that are typically marginalized or overlooked by mainstream cinema. In short, it is easy to describe Jarmusch and his films, broadly, as *different*, and as scholars writing on American independent cinema have demonstrated, difference, however flexibly (or vaguely) defined, is one of the key factors in labeling a given work or filmmaker as independent. One aim of this thesis will be to clearly define the manner and extent of difference and independence as they apply to Jarmusch’s cinema.

However, for all of the same reasons stated above, it is curious that Jarmusch has rarely been considered by scholars as a filmmaker working in the realm of art cinema. Indeed, American filmmakers in general tend to be overlooked in this area. One reason for this is probably the slipperiness of the concept of art cinema as a field of study. The field is typically identified as consisting of works and filmmakers—often European or otherwise non-U.S.—working outside of commercial cinema and in contradistinction to the economic, cultural, and

aesthetic meanings embodied by Hollywood cinema. Further, the association of art cinema with post-war European cinema has played a role in limiting the understanding of the term to include primarily films and filmmakers from nations other than the United States. Nonetheless, studies of American independent cinema, such as those of Geoff King and Yannis Tzioumakis discussed later, often establish criteria similar to those of art cinema studies in order to define the field.

This thesis will situate Jarmusch's cinema within the context of both American independent cinema studies and art cinema studies. Thus, one of the primary aims of this thesis will be to establish complimentary working definitions of both areas. This will be accomplished by considering Jarmusch's cinema as a point of intersection between the two areas, which will in turn address the fluidity of each, linking them to the global as manifested in the singular case of Jarmusch's cinema. Through textual and industrial analysis of Jarmusch's feature film production and the accompanying scholarly and popular criticism, it will be demonstrated that Jarmusch's films are representative of both American independent cinema and a category that Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover have labeled Global Art Cinema.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to identify a useful approach to understanding and categorizing the cinema of Jim Jarmusch. I argue that Jarmusch's status as an American independent filmmaker is fundamentally tied to his global cinematic presence. While Jarmusch is certainly an American filmmaker, I think it should not be taken for granted that he makes films that can easily be identified as American. His financing is mostly (almost entirely) foreign; a significant number of foreign characters populate his films and speak numerous languages; his approaches to mise-en-scene and narrative are heavily influenced by foreign cinema; and the

perspectives his films take toward American culture regularly destabilize cultural identity by situating it in a global context.

Since the early 1980s, Jarmusch has regularly been identified with contemporary American independent cinema and as an auteur. The relationship between the trajectory and output of Jarmusch's career and the development of the contemporary American independent cinema is certainly important, and it will be discussed in this thesis; however, the particular ways by which Jarmusch has maintained his independence over the course of more than thirty years differs significantly from those of his contemporaries in American independent cinema. John Sayles, for instance, produces his films independently of Hollywood studios (with some exceptions such as *Baby It's You* [1983] and *Lone Star* [1996]), but he has regularly raised personal finances for his films by working as a screenwriter on studio films such as *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (1986) and *The Spiderwick Chronicles* (2008). Jarmusch, conversely, has written and directed all of—and only—his own screenplays and has acquired financing for his films almost entirely from non-Hollywood-studio sources, and unlike Sayles, he has ownership of all the negatives of his films. Further, while Sayles' films, like Jarmusch's, regularly express an openly oppositional ideological stance, in terms of mise-en-scene, Sayles' style is far more unassuming and less difficult to categorize than Jarmusch's often experimental approaches. Categorizing filmmakers as different as Jarmusch and Sayles, as many have done, under contemporary American independent cinema is useful in identifying a historical-industrial context in which many American filmmakers produced prominent work with a significant degree of independence from and opposition to Hollywood studios. However, as their approaches to production and mise-en-scene demonstrate, the independent cinema category does not adequately account for their differences.

The global art cinema category would seem to be more useful in understanding the particularities of Jarmusch's work for a few reasons. First, Jarmusch's films rely for their very existence on their continued financing and positive critical and public reception from foreign countries. Second, the formal qualities of his films—i.e. mise-en-scene and narrative—share many features with European art cinema from the post-war period to the present (e.g. passive protagonists, drifting narratives, long takes, ambiguity, and realism). Third, Jarmusch's films frequently explore situations in which people from different cultures or with different ideological perspectives interact to their benefit or detriment, and this interaction occurs often on a global scale. Thus all three of these areas—industry, form, and cultural/ideological perspectives—are closely intertwined in Jarmusch's cinema, and global relationships are central in each.

Nonetheless, the category of global art cinema remains fairly undefined in the existing literature. Galt and Schoonover repeatedly emphasize the “impurity” and flexibility of the category, its non-definability as a defining feature. This is a problematic element, as Galt and Schoonover probably intend it to be. However, this concept of impurity may be useful in allowing for or encouraging a consideration of how the intersections of industry, form, and content manifest in particular historical contexts. In this thesis, I intend to explore the strengths and limitations of the global art cinema approach through the particular case of Jarmusch, and to do so I will address some of the most important concepts in the literature on American independent cinema, post-war art cinema, and global art cinema as they pertain to Jarmusch's work.

A significant aspect of this study is that explores the usefulness of broad categories, such as American independent cinema and global art cinema, recognized and discussed by scholars, filmmakers, and general audiences, for understanding an individual filmmaker. I expect this

study to show that, while Jarmusch remains a difficult filmmaker to categorize, the categories do help to reveal something of the historical milieu in which he has worked and which has in part defined and challenged his ability to maintain a significant degree of creative and economic control over his work. Specifically, the development of the contemporary American independent cinema beginning in the early 1980s created an opening for Jarmusch to develop his reputation as a significant film artist, while the later growth of the same independent sector into a considerable economic phenomenon increasingly aligned with Hollywood studios in the U.S. challenged Jarmusch's access to filmmaking resources and control over his work. Despite these challenges, however, his continued relationships with the global cinema industry helped to sustain his work and creative control against the changing context of contemporary independent cinema. These categories may enable such an examination of Jarmusch's cinema. While this will certainly not amount to the final analysis of the issue, I hope it contributes to independent cinema and global art cinema discourses by illustrating through one particular case how issues of globality are central to understanding the areas of industry, form, and content.

Scope and Limitations

This thesis will focus primarily on Jim Jarmusch's feature film production between 1995 and 2009, which encompasses his films *Dead Man* (1995), *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (1999), *Broken Flowers* (2005), and *The Limits of Control* (2009). With the exception of *Dead Man*, which is the Jarmusch film that has been most discussed in scholarly and popular writing, these films have not inspired much of in the way of scholarly attention. Nonetheless, *Dead Man* will be discussed here because it marks a stark turning point in Jarmusch's mise-en-scene and narrative structure which has continued to evolve through the other three features discussed here.

Limiting the bulk of the study to these four films seeks to emphasize the contemporary global context in which Jarmusch continues to work and to draw greater attention to what I consider an overlooked phase in his career.

Dead Man marks the first time a Jarmusch film (with the exception of his student film, *Permanent Vacation* [1980]) focuses on an individual protagonist. In contrast, the previous films are structured around small ensembles of three primary characters (*Stranger Than Paradise* [1984] and *Down by Law* [1986]), or consist of several groups of small-ensemble-based vignettes that become linked to one another by way of theme and temporal experimentation (*Mystery Train* [1989] and *Night on Earth* [1992]). Beginning with *Dead Man*, Jarmusch's films follow an individual protagonist from beginning to end, thereby signifying a distinct alteration in terms of narrative structure that is closely linked with a more overt, complex, and critical engagement with American culture and values in *Dead Man*, *Ghost Dog*, *Broken Flowers*, and *The Limits of Control*. This engagement is elicited in a number of ways. For one, these films, more so than any others in Jarmusch's oeuvre, consciously work within and simultaneously against identifiable genres, especially the Western, gangster, samurai, mystery, and existentialist assassin genres. The degree to which these films adhere to or depart from generic conventions serves the complementary purposes of critiquing genre and defining a cultural milieu. For another, the intensified focus on an individual protagonist allows for a greater depth of consideration of the relationship of the individual to the surrounding cultural milieu as defined by the engagement with genre.

Two feature films released during this 1995-2009 period—*Year of the Horse* (1997) and *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003)—will be addressed in passing, but will not be explored in depth. The reasoning here is that, for one, neither film is a narrative feature, and for another, both films

are in a sense compilation films. *Year of the Horse* is a concert documentary of Neil Young and Crazy Horse that uses a combination of new (1996) footage shot by Jarmusch and vintage footage from 1976, as well as footage from 1986 credited to a film titled *Muddy Track*, directed by Bernard Shakey (Young's pseudonym) (Kubernik 219). *Coffee and Cigarettes* consists of a compilation of Jarmusch's short films produced between 1986 and 2003. Thus, while formally and thematically they may be useful in understanding Jarmusch's development as a filmmaker, they cannot be considered "pure" examples of the main body of his work during this period, being that their contents had been completed at various times throughout the previous two decades.

Review of Literature

In recent scholarship that deals with either American independent cinema or global art cinema, there has not been a significant discussion of any possible connection between the two. The scholarship on global art cinema addresses Hollywood often. Non-U.S. cinema is viewed as needing to situate itself in opposition to Hollywood, in competition with Hollywood, or with complete disregard for Hollywood. Similarly, much of the scholarship on American independent cinema, in attempting to classify or define this cinema, has found it necessary to situate it in often oppositional relation to Hollywood. For these reasons, it seems natural that the two areas of study may intersect. In studies of both areas, Hollywood often embodies subtly shifting meanings, but in most cases serves as an industrial, formal, and cultural construct representing the dominant cinema against which independent and foreign films attempt to establish a presence or identity. For the purposes of this study, Hollywood refers to the industry and filmmakers who make films using Hollywood studios as their primary source of production financing, and films

which typically receive theatrical distribution through multiplex cinemas, as opposed to the independent or art house cinemas which typically exhibit independent and foreign films. Further, David Bordwell's description of the classical narrative cinema (discussed in the Art Cinema section of this chapter) serves as the basic (though not all-encompassing) primary model for Hollywood narrative in this thesis. Bordwell's conception is useful here because he defines Hollywood cinema by what it is (typically) not—art cinema. Finally, the expansion of Hollywood studios by way of “specialty” divisions into production and/or distribution of foreign and independent-like films, inspired in the mid- and late-1990s by a number of blockbuster successes, further blurs these boundaries, and this complication receives greater attention in the second chapter.

What scholars, the film industry, critics, and audiences refer to as American independent cinema has been aligned with or opposed to Hollywood studios in varying degrees since the early 1980s. Borrowing from Holmlund and Wyatt (2005), I will refer to this period as Contemporary American Independent Cinema. The period under discussion here is distinguishable from Hollywood cinema in several areas, including industrial (i.e. financing, production, distribution, and exhibition) and formal (i.e. mise-en-scene and narrative) approaches and cultural/ideological perspectives (i.e., “alternative” vs. “mainstream”). In each of these areas, independent cinema presents alternatives to Hollywood. I plan to situate Jim Jarmusch as an independent filmmaker and to demonstrate that his films tend to exemplify a cinema whose style and content are more global than national, more critical than acquiescent, which, in conjunction with the manner in which he engages the film industry, also classifies him as a practitioner of global art cinema. The relevant literature will be discussed below in three

sections: Jim Jarmusch and Contemporary American Independent Cinema, Art Cinema, and Global Art Cinema.

Jim Jarmusch and Contemporary American Independent Cinema

The extant literature on contemporary American independent cinema typically addresses the field from three important angles: 1) industry—financing, marketing, and distribution; 2) form—narrative structure, mise-en-scene, and genre; and 3) cultural and ideological perspectives. Likewise, the great majority of the relatively slight literature on Jarmusch situates his work within the context of American independent cinema, and thus addresses his work from the same three angles.

In terms of industry, American independent film is typically distinguished from Hollywood by relatively low budgets, financing accumulated through a variety of primarily non-Hollywood sources, and distribution focusing on specialized (i.e. non-multiplex) markets. In *American Independent Cinema* (2005), Geoff King writes, “Most of the initial breakthrough, low-budget independent films of the 1980s and 1990s,” such as Jarmusch’s *Stranger Than Paradise*, “were completed without the aid of investment from distributors,” although many may receive some financing through advance sales of video, cable, or international theatrical rights (18). Following completion, a common approach for an independent film is to attempt entry in one or more of the various film festivals in the film festival circuit that continued to grow from the early-1980s to the present. Recognition at a festival, in the best case scenario, could eventually lead to a distribution deal which typically rolls an independent film out slowly across the art house circuit that had been developing as an alternative to the major studio multiplex experience since the 1970s (Wilinsky 134). Thus, as opposed to Hollywood broadly speaking,

independent film consists of a building from the ground up with no guarantee of an audience of any size; if fortunate, an independent art house film may find an audience in a smaller, specialized sector. In the case of Jarmusch's work, international film festivals, foreign financing, and the specialized art-house sector have played sustaining roles so that, "always working on the margins of the industry, he has managed to remain visible and to maintain a steady rhythm of production" (Suarez 2) that for many filmmakers has served as a model of independence from Hollywood.

Form—specifically mise-en-scene, narrative, and genre—in American independent cinema can be wide-ranging, from the extremes of the avant-garde to more mainstream approaches. In fact, the wide array of approaches to narrative, style, and genre represent the flexibility of American independent cinema and complicate attempts to define it as a category. King argues that American independent cinema of the feature-length variety is largely based in narrative, and thus more closely aligned with the mainstream than the avant-garde, but that deviations from classical Hollywood conventions are essential features of many American independent films (*AIC* 59). Citing "more relaxed or decentred structures akin to those associated with some forms of international 'art' cinema" and some narrative structures that are "more complex than the typical Hollywood narrative," such as multi-strand narratives and narrative in reverse (*AIC* 59-60), King once again emphasizes the flexibility and range of possibilities within the category. A similar flexibility and range can be found in camera positioning/movement, image quality (glossy color vs. grainy black and white), and approaches to editing and genre (*AIC* 107). Of Jarmusch specifically, Juan Suarez (*Jim Jarmusch, 2007*) emphasizes that he "followed on the steps of the art cinema of the 1960s and 1970s and made formally spare, slow-moving films concerned with intimacy, the exploration of character, and the

reformulation of the classical narrative molds” (2). Analysis of these formal qualities, and the manner in which they differ from concurrent Hollywood product, provide one of the central approaches to Jarmusch’s films in the literature.

The flexibility of American independent film as a category extends to the expansiveness and variety of the cultural perspectives that it allows for and embraces. In particular, it has “provided an arena hospitable to a number of constituencies generally subjected to neglect or stereotypical representation in the mainstream” such as “black- and gay-oriented cinema” (King, *AIC* 199); for Jarmusch, the emphasis is typically on marginal characters, outsiders, “transients and immigrants” that often “go against the grain of birth-given nationality and ethnicity” (Suarez 5). In some cases, the treatment of controversial, taboo, or challenging subject matter has avoided the general Hollywood tendency of smoothing over or reconciling contentious aspects of identity or ideology (King, *AIC* 199). But the range and flexibility of American independent cinema remain significant: “At one end of the spectrum lies material that is radical in both form and content, in aesthetics and politics, while the other shades into the Hollywood mainstream” (*AIC* 201). Under these conditions, an ostensibly independent production like *The English Patient* (Minghella, 1996), in many ways a traditional Hollywood epic, can boast a \$30 million budget and a Best Picture Oscar, while Jarmusch’s aesthetically and ideologically audacious *Dead Man* (1995), with a budget of \$9 million, shows in theaters for only a few weeks. The industrial parameters, formal qualities, and cultural perspectives embodied in contemporary American independent cinema represent a range of possibilities that, while relying for distinction on its differentiation from mainstream or Hollywood cinema, create an opening for various degrees of opposition which it shares with the art cinema associated primarily with Europe.

Art Cinema

Art cinema has been a difficult category of film to define because how the category is understood can be contingent on specific historical and cultural contexts. Yet as a discursive category, certain notions tend to hold as principles across and within historical and cultural contexts. As Barbara Wilinsky argues in *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (2001), “Despite the contradictions in attempts to fix the boundaries of the art film, one characteristic generally agreed upon is that art films are not mainstream Hollywood films. In fact, it often seems that art films are not defined by their thematic and formalistic similarities, but rather by their differences from Hollywood films” (15). Thus Hollywood cinema—in art cinema studies, a term often used interchangeably with the terms “mainstream cinema” or “dominant cinema”—stands always as the system of industrial, formal, and thematic practices against which art cinema defines itself, and the boundaries of the art cinema remain flexible in order to carve out a distinct position in the field.

Despite the abundant varieties of art films, certain formal qualities have remained important in discussions attempting to define art cinema. In “Art Cinema as Institution” (1981), Steve Neale writes, “Art films tend to be marked by a stress on visual style, by a suppression of action in the Hollywood sense, by a consequent stress on character rather than plot and by an interiorisation of dramatic conflict” (13). By focusing on art cinema as a distinct mode of film practice, David Bordwell (“Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice,” 1979) is able to discuss with more specificity the mode against which art cinema becomes defined—classical narrative cinema. According to Bordwell, in classical narrative cinema, cause-effect logic and goal-oriented characters drive the narrative, and all formal qualities (editing, mise-en-scene, cinematography, sound) are modulated to serve in advancing the narrative. The art cinema, in

turn, “defines itself explicitly against the classical narrative mode, and especially against the cause-effect linkage of events. These linkages become looser, more tenuous in the art film” (57). In its divergence from the classical narrative form, the art film relies instead for its coherence on realism (the complexities or messiness of real life), authorship (an individual’s free expression as a structuring element), and ambiguity (complexities/contradictions, open endings) (Bordwell 60).

While these efforts to define art cinema are generally accepted, it is equally agreed upon that to more fully understand the dynamics of art cinema we must utilize an approach that also encompasses industry—that is, the international production, distribution, and exhibition of art cinema, as well as the larger institutional framework that includes critics and general audiences. Some more recent developments in art cinema studies to be discussed below have expanded beyond analysis of form to examine these industrial and global aspects of art cinema.

Global Art Cinema

The concept of global art cinema provides a flexible framework by which to identify and understand films, filmmakers, and/or film movements that transcend institutional, geographic, and formal borders. In their introduction to *Global Art Cinema* (2010), editors Galt and Schoonover explain, “At various points, [art cinema] has intersected with popular genres, national cinemas, revolutionary film, and the avant-garde, and has mixed corporate, state, and independent capital” (3). This wide-ranging role of art cinema has led to some difficulty in defining it as a category of film, but as has already been demonstrated, certain notions about the category have been widely accepted. Galt and Schoonover argue that this impurity is a defining feature of art cinema as a category because “art cinema always perverts the standard categories used to divide up institutions, locations, histories, or spectators” (6-7).

One of the key features of global art cinema is that it challenges standard approaches to understanding cinema in its relationship to institutional space. For example, Galt and Schoonover note, “In common usage, ‘art cinema’ describes feature-length narrative films at the margins of mainstream cinema, located somewhere between fully experimental films and overtly commercial products” (6). Similarly, Bordwell names films by Fellini, Bergman, Truffaut, and Wajda, and argues that “whatever else one can say about these films, cultural fiat gives them a role altogether different from *Rio Bravo* on the one hand and *Mothlight* on the other” (56), once again situating art cinema somewhere between the mainstream (Hawks) and the avant-garde (Brakhage). This potential of art cinema to inhabit wide-ranging and uncertain positions along the institutional spectrum results in a problematic blurring of boundaries that inflects the remaining features.

Another important feature of global art cinema is that it complicates notions of location in relation to cinema, and this is where the term “global” becomes essential. Galt and Schoonover state that “It is a resolutely international category, often a code for foreign film” (7). Likewise, Bordwell focuses almost entirely on European films in his essay, with occasional nods to Japanese, Indian, and American cinema. Neale also addresses European films almost exclusively. These authors do, however, briefly address the relationship of art cinema to American films and filmmakers. Bordwell cites Sirk, Ford, Lang, and Hitchcock as having had “something of the art cinema about them” (62); interestingly, of these classical Hollywood names, Ford is the only one not born in Europe, and who did not make his first films there. Neale claims that art cinema “is a niche within the international film market...not yet completely dominated by Hollywood,” and goes on to cite Altman and Coppola as examples of Hollywood filmmakers who lean in the direction of art cinema. Both authors’ examples limit American

cinema to its Hollywood sector while neglecting non-Hollywood production, perhaps due to the fact that they are writing prior to the rise of contemporary American independent cinema.

Generally, though, Hollywood is seen as a co-opting force in relation to art cinema, or a force against which art cinema defines itself. Galt and Schoonover redress this oversight in their argument that art cinema “always carries a comparativist impulse and transnational tenor” (7).

That is, in relying in part on foreign financing and distribution and alternative, even oppositional cultural perspectives, art cinema indeed crosses and blurs national/geographic borders and cultural boundaries in production, distribution, and reception.

The already complex issues of film genre, stardom, and authorship become more complicated when considering global art cinema. In keeping with the overriding impurity of the category, classical genres tend to become less relevant or less rigid, or serve as forces representing traditional values, ideologies, or representations for the art film to confront directly. Jarmusch’s film *Dead Man*, for example, has been referred to as “a neo-western, a postmodern western, a parody of a western, even an acid western by its various reviewers” (Kilpatrick 169). Obviously, there is something “western” about *Dead Man*, but it clearly is not a western in any sense that would allow reviewers to label it a “western” without additional modifiers. Genre typically becomes subordinate to an emphasis on authorship. Bordwell claims that in art cinema, “the author becomes a formal component, the overriding intelligence organizing the film for our comprehension” (59), and thus deviations from generic expectations can be interpreted as a marker of free expression or authorial intent. Neale notes another function of authorship: “The name of the author can function as a ‘brand name’, a means of labeling and selling a film and of orienting expectation and channeling meaning and pleasure in the absence of generic boundaries and categories” (36). Global art cinema’s relationship to genre, stardom, and authorship, which

ranges from outright rejection of Hollywood standards to something more closely aligned (Galt and Schoonover 7), reflects the flexibility of the category and its contingency upon specific contexts and complex global cinematic relationships.

Global art cinema implies a spectator who is curious about or willing and able to imagine lifestyles, experiences, or identities (cultural, political, national, social, etc.) different from her or his own. According to Galt and Schoonover, “Art cinema demands that we watch across cultures and see ourselves through foreign eyes, binding spectatorship and pleasure into an experience of geographical difference, or potentially of geopolitical critique” (11). This understanding further articulates the intrinsically transnational quality of art cinema, a quality which situates it as a category usefully equipped “to engage pressing contemporary questions of globalization, world culture, and how the economics of cinema’s transnational flows might intersect with trajectories of film form” (Galt and Schoonover 3). In terms of industry, form, and cultural perspectives and address, art cinema has been always bound up with international concerns. However, Hollywood cinema (as well as non-Hollywood American cinema) has had at all times a similarly complex relationship with such international concerns, and Galt and Schoonover do not adequately address this fact. One reason Jarmusch is the subject of this study is that, as an American filmmaker, his work is not only the product of global circulation of funds, personnel, and other elements of production and exhibition, but it also makes the global circulation of culture an *explicit* element its form and content. On one hand, the case of Jarmusch problematizes Galt and Schoonover’s description of the global art cinema category. On the other hand, the understanding of Jarmusch also benefits in some ways by the global art cinema context suggested by the category.

Methodology

This thesis takes a generally political-economic approach to Jarmusch's films in that it incorporates analysis of their industrial, formal, and cultural/ideological aspects and the intersections between them. Both lines of study overlap in a number of significant ways, perhaps most importantly in that, while they address broad concepts—"independent film" and "art film"—familiar to filmmakers/producers, academics, and popular audiences, they tend to dissolve any neat binaries assumed to exist between these concepts and their shared other, namely Hollywood.

Geoff King states that independence "is a relative rather than an absolute quality and can be defined as such at the industrial and other [formal, cultural] levels" (*AIC* 9). For example, Yannis Tzioumakis uses a discursive formulation of American independent cinema to account for the historical contingencies and cultural contexts involved in any given definition of the category. To place Tzioumakis' discursive formulation within the context of this thesis, Jim Jarmusch's work first appears in the early 1980s when independent cinema was largely associated with questions of power relations. This association developed because, "With the major entertainment conglomerates tightening their grip on everything related to American cinema and with Reaganite entertainment defining mainstream cinema and reigning supreme at the box office," films that were produced without the financial or distributional participation of the majors and that achieved some commercial success became a point of pride and recognition (Tzioumakis 12). This thesis shares with this formulation a concern for historical context and, in Chapter Two, will place an emphasis on situating Jarmusch's work within the evolving industrial context of American independent cinema between 1980 and 2009. In this usage, industry is understood as not only the processes and means of financing, production, distribution, and

exhibition, but also the surrounding institutional framework that includes critics and general audiences. Therefore, I will draw from trade journals, interviews others have conducted with Jarmusch over the past three decades, journalistic accounts of the independent cinema culture and industry, and histories of contemporary American independent cinema.

Galt and Schoonover's formulation of global art cinema will provide another important approach to Jarmusch's work. This approach takes into account the vagaries of geographic, national, cultural, and historical contexts that inspire or define the art cinema's perceived differentiation from Hollywood. For Galt and Schoonover, "it is the critical category best placed to engage pressing contemporary questions of globalization, world culture, and how the economics of cinema's transnational flows might intersect with trajectories of film form" (3). In the third and fourth chapters of this thesis, the intersection between the geopolitical (having its foundations laid in Chapter Two's discussion of how a reliance on foreign financing and distribution have defined Jarmusch's career) and the aesthetic elements of Jarmusch's work will be discussed in the framework set forth by the global art cinema approach. In my textual analysis of mise-en-scene and narrative I will focus in particular on how the approaches to narrative, genre, and editing in *Dead Man*, *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, *Broken Flowers*, and *The Limits of Control* illustrate a divergence from Hollywood and an engagement with global art cinema.

Taken together, the industrial, formal, and cultural/ideological analyses avoid a strictly auteurist approach to Jarmusch's work and instead seek to locate the filmmaker's activities and works within the wider historical, institutional, and cultural contexts that have been alternately beneficial and constraining.

Organization of the Thesis

The body of this thesis is divided into chapters that will focus in turn on the areas of industry, form, and cultural/ideological perspectives as they pertain to the cinema of Jim Jarmusch. In each of these areas, the relationship to global art cinema will be emphasized. Chapter Two addresses the industrial side of Jarmusch's films in three phases. Despite early success as an independent filmmaker who drew the attention of major Hollywood studios, Jarmusch consistently declined studio deals in favor of a greater degree of independence and direct control of his work. This chapter is the only one that will give significant attention to the first two phases of Jarmusch's career spanning 1980-86 and 1989-92, respectively, because they are important factors in understanding the American and world cinematic cultures in which Jarmusch developed. The details of how the films from these phases were financed, exhibited, and distributed help to establish Jarmusch's independence and his engagement with global art cinema in ways that have provided a framework that sustains his work to the present. This industrial framework will be traced through the third phase of Jarmusch's career (1995-2009) which provides the primary focus of the thesis.

Chapter three turns the focus to the formal qualities of the narrative features of Jarmusch's third phase, spanning four films—*Dead Man*, *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, *Broken Flowers*, and *The Limits of Control*—released between 1995 and 2009. Particular attention will be given to style, narrative, and genre. In these areas, the manner in which the films from this phase diverge from mainstream or Hollywood expectations is illustrated by a number of devices that draw attention explicitly and implicitly to their difference. The

consistency of the long take and the fade to black between scenes, for example, serve to de-emphasize narrative drive in favor of contemplative observation of mise-en-scene. At a more explicit level, the reconfigurations of genre in *Dead Man* and *Ghost Dog* challenge expectations and values often transmitted through traditional genres.

Chapter four provides readings of cultural and ideological perspectives in the films from the third phase. All four films depict cultures in decline, but in each case there is arguably also an effort to suggest alternatives or possibilities for reconstituting the culture. *Dead Man* can be read as a critique of both the western genre and American imperialism, with particular emphasis on investing greater complexity in the representations of Native Americans in film. *Ghost Dog* presents the possibility of an honorable existence in a corrupt culture through the appropriation of ancient codes, while *Broken Flowers* portrays emptiness resulting from solipsism and the pursuit and acquisition of wealth and comfort that rejects a deeper engagement with people and culture. In *The Limits of Control*, the individual's attunement to his surroundings and his capacity for contemplative experience are positioned as challenges/alternatives to technological and political mechanisms of surveillance and control.

The conclusion addresses the results of the study and the significance of positioning Jim Jarmusch as a practitioner of global art cinema. It also suggests ideas for further research in independent cinema and global art cinema studies.

Chapter Two: Financing, Distribution, and Exhibition (1980-2009)

“Rule #2: Don’t let the fuckers get ya...People who finance films, distribute films, promote films and exhibit films are not filmmakers...”

“Rule #3: The production is there to serve the film. The film is not there to serve the production. Unfortunately, in the world of filmmaking this is almost universally backwards. The film is not being made to serve the budget, the schedule, or the resumes of those involved. Filmmakers who don’t understand this should be hung from their ankles and asked why the sky appears to be upside down.”

- from “Jim Jarmusch’s Golden Rules,” *MovieMaker Magazine*

Introduction: “What’s wrong with art?”

Jarmusch has long considered his autonomy as a filmmaker to be of utmost importance. Interviewing Jarmusch for *Filmmaker* magazine in 1996, Scott Macaulay notes that Jarmusch could have made many films with American studios, which would have made the financing aspect of filmmaking much easier. Macaulay suspects, however, that this would have come with the cost of losing some autonomy. Jarmusch agrees, “The only thing that matters to me is to protect my ability to be the navigator of the ship,” and notes that he determines the editing, scoring, length, cast, financing, and scripting (47). Here, and in many other interviews, Jarmusch draws attention to the value he places in his autonomy as a filmmaker. Consistently, he emphasizes that his ability to get a film made on his own terms is the most important thing—more important than economic returns, popular recognition, or critical prestige.

Concerning Jarmusch's autonomy, Berra observes, "While it is unlikely that Jarmusch wants audiences and critics to be uninterested in his work, he would not mind too much if this were the case" (96). Berra goes on to claim that if his films were to become popular due to some commercial success, Jarmusch would "feel that he had not been true to his singular vision through the making of a film that could be widely accessible" (96). That is, the qualities that make films widely accessible and the industrial apparatus that delivers such films runs counter to his priorities. Jarmusch himself reinforces this notion in the Macaulay interview:

My films are ghettoized by being called art movies...What's wrong with art? But they will make anything a dirty word to make commerce and corporate control the priority. That's Hollywood. Who has the most powerful agent and how much money can the lawyers suck out of the above-the-line? (47)

Thus, commercial success could mean failure as an artist because, due to the nature of the processes by which a film becomes commercially successful, commercial success heralds failure for a filmmaker who objects to those processes.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the degree of autonomy that Jarmusch has been able to secure derives in some part from his having something of a minor commercial success with his second feature film, *Stranger Than Paradise* (1984). Made for about \$120,000 (Ferncase 59), the film ended up grossing approximately \$2.5 million theatrically in the U.S. (Berra 102) after winning several prestigious festival prizes, including the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. Thus, Jarmusch, having established his reputation relatively quickly, was able to parlay his early success into a career. Further, *Stranger Than Paradise* both benefitted from and contributed to the burgeoning independent/art house cinema scene which had its roots in the late 1970s and would explode in the late '80s and early '90s with films like *sex, lies, and*

videotape (Soderbergh, 1989) and *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994). Jarmusch's film revealed the potential for commercial success of small, independent films, and the degree of commercial success, and the emphasis thereon, continued to expand.

Regarding the development of the American independent/art house cinema scene of the late '70s and early '80s, Yannis Tzioumakis demonstrates that it arose in the context of the media conglomerates' permeation of the entertainment industry. As major studios pursued projects with the most potential for ancillary market profits from toys, lunch boxes, clothing, and pop soundtracks, smaller distributors sought out independent films which were concerned with "voicing alternative views, representing minorities, examining social problems, uncovering 'hidden histories', in short dealing with subject matter that commercial television and (largely) film avoided" (Tzioumakis 209). Distributors of these kinds of independent films took advantage of an educated, adult market segment being underserved by the major studios' product. Independent films toured the art-house circuit and benefitted from the expanding home video and cable television markets. In this context, "the new American independent cinema started demonstrating some commercial potential" because an industrial framework had developed, one that provided support for independent films (Tzioumakis 209).

While Jarmusch considers himself "a minor poet who writes fairly small poems" and who "would rather make a movie about a guy walking his dog than about the emperor of China" (Hertzberg 92), it must be understood that there exists an industrial framework for making this position for him as an artist possible. Nonetheless, Jarmusch's position within the field of American independent film production is fairly unique. Like very few other major filmmakers, he owns the negatives to all of his films, "giving him complete control over their distribution on video, television, and cable" (Ferncase 64), and he receives almost all of the financing for his

films from foreign investors. In short, while there has been an institutional framework in place that has supported Jarmusch's work, it is a framework that has allowed him to pursue his artistic interests on his own terms and, in fact, retain the autonomy that he claims.

This chapter traces Jarmusch's career from his first (1980) to his most recent film (2009). It will identify the methods by which he has received financing and analyze how the wide-ranging commercial and critical responses to his films, both in the U.S. and abroad, have influenced the trajectory of his career. In my use of it throughout this chapter (and the larger thesis), the term "industry" refers not only to the sources of financing and the approach to film production and distribution, but also to the larger industrial contexts of contemporary American independent cinema and global art cinema. These industrial contexts require an examination of the roles played by film festivals, critics, and box office data, as well as the continuing evolution of independent cinema and global art cinema as institutions. With regard to this evolution, Suarez observes, "Taken in broad outline, Jarmusch's career has reflected the changing fortunes of the independent cinema" (97). Following on Suarez's observation, this chapter looks at Jarmusch's career in three distinct, chronological phases and traces its evolution in the context of the changing American independent cinema field while arguing that Jarmusch's ongoing engagement with global cinematic culture and global financing have largely sustained his work against the changing expectations of American independent cinema.

Phase 1: Fortuitous Beginnings (1980-86)

Permanent Vacation (1980)

Although the funds were intended to pay for tuition, Jarmusch produced *Permanent Vacation* using approximately \$15,000 he received for the Louis B. Mayer Foundation

Fellowship while a student at New York University (Suarez 21). He and his cast and crew managed to maintain a minimal budget by using the free labor of friends and NYU students, by forgoing proper location filming permits, and by employing a minimum of dialogue to avoid potential sound editing costs (Berra 101-2). Jarmusch submitted the completed film for his thesis project, but the school rejected it because it was too long (at 75 minutes, feature length). Jarmusch, as if taking a cue from his film's title, subsequently left school never to return.

While *Permanent Vacation* never received a theatrical release in the United States, and never received any commercial theatrical release, it did encounter some recognition in Europe. It won the Josef von Sternberg Award (for which Jarmusch received a \$2,000 prize) at the Mannheim-Heidelberg International Film Festival. Then the German television network WDR purchased the German TV rights for the film, and the film screened at festivals in Berlin and Rotterdam. This virtually marked the end of the line for *Permanent Vacation* until 2007, when the Criterion Collection included the film as a bonus disc for their DVD release of *Stranger Than Paradise*.

The industrial trajectory traced by *Permanent Vacation* in many ways resembles that of most of Jarmusch's films to follow: "reliance on festival exposure, recognition in Europe against relative indifference at home, and critical success seldom accompanied by substantial box office" (Suarez 28). As important as the recognition Jarmusch receives in Europe, though, is the financial support he would continue to receive from Europe, and later Japan, to produce films independently without script approval or other forms of oversight. While his vacation from the American industry would not be total or permanent, the presence of foreign assistance would remain central to his work.

Stranger Than Paradise (1984) and *Down by Law* (1986)

In February 1982 (Ferncase 58), Jarmusch and a small cast and crew used about forty minutes of raw black and white film stock—a gift from German director Wim Wenders and his company, Gray City Films—to shoot a short film over one weekend. The resulting thirty-minute short, titled *Stranger Than Paradise*, had lab costs covered by Gray City Films in exchange for ownership of the negative and the finished film (Suarez 28). This would come to mark the first and last time that anyone other than Jarmusch owned the negative of a Jarmusch film.

According to John Pierson's account, Jarmusch and filmmaker Sara Driver, his production partner at the time and his continuing romantic partner, "mounted a portable 35mm projector in the middle of the dance floor at the club Danceteria [in New York] one night early in 1983 to show the short and try to generate interest and cash for the remaining two thirds of the film, which had been scripted" (25-6). In the meantime, because it also functioned as a self-contained film, Jarmusch entered the short in the Rotterdam (the Netherlands) and Hof (Germany) film festivals. It received an award at Rotterdam, and while at Hof, Jarmusch met filmmaker Paul Bartel, whose film *Eating Raoul* (1982) was on its way to some box office success, and a German chocolate entrepreneur named Otto Grokenberger. Bartel provided money for Jarmusch to reclaim the negative and rights to the short from Gray City Films, thus clearing the way for Grokenberger and the German TV channel ZDF to supply the necessary funds to complete the remainder of the scripted feature (Suarez 29), also to be titled *Stranger Than Paradise*.

These humble-yet-fortuitous beginnings would not begin to suggest the impact that *Stranger Than Paradise* would have on the contemporary American independent cinema and

Jarmusch's career. The feature was shot for approximately \$120,000, including \$10,000 used towards securing the rights to Screamin' Jay Hawkins' song "I Put a Spell on You" (Wood 207). It premiered at the 1984 Cannes Film Festival, where it became the cheapest film, and the first American film, to win the Camera d'Or for best first feature (Berra 102), though American distributors "weren't entirely convinced, thinking that the enthusiastic reaction might be unique to foreign filmgoers" (Pierson 26). The Samuel Goldwyn Company, a recently formed outfit that began distributing independent and foreign films in the U.S. during this period, eventually acquired distribution rights. *Stranger Than Paradise* then screened at the Filmex (Los Angeles), Telluride, and New York film festivals, garnering critical raves from the likes of Vincent Canby and Roger Ebert along the way, before eventually grossing about \$2.5 million in North America, winning the National Society of Film Critics award for best film, and finding success abroad, particularly in France and Japan (Pierson 27). The recognition, both critical and financial, that *Stranger Than Paradise* received served as an almost totemic indicator for aspiring independent filmmakers—and potential investors and distributors—of what could be achieved by a feature film on such a small budget: filmmakers as diverse as Spike Lee, Gus Van Sant, and Kevin Smith have all cited the influence of this single film in terms of aesthetic and economic possibilities.

While many aspiring independents during this period and especially in the early 1990s would use similar success as a springboard into Hollywood studio-backed production, Jarmusch opted differently:

I got a script, after *Stranger* was successful, from Hollywood they wanted me to direct, and they said they'd pay me a quarter of a million dollars to make a teenage sex comedy. The letter said "We know that this script reads a little like

Risky Business, but, take our word for it, after the re-write it will read much more like *The Graduate*.” (Hertzberg 52)

Jarmusch did not accept the offer. Still, he had a fresh reputation and potential financing connections in the U.S. and abroad which he used to produce his own script, *Down by Law*. Otto Grokenberger of Germany again provided funding, while Island/Alive, another company specializing in independent and foreign films, handled North American distribution. Eventually, according to Pierson, “*Down by Law* was a quiet commercial disappointment given the fact that it cost ten times more than *Stranger Than Paradise* and grossed less [in the U.S.]” (76), but it did compete at Cannes (losing the Palm d’Or to another Island/Alive item, Spike Lee’s *She’s Gotta Have It*) and received awards and nominations at festivals in Italy, Denmark, and Norway. Jarmusch’s global outreach continued not only in terms of financing and awards; he also cast Italian actors Roberto Benigni and Nicoletta Braschi in central roles, hired budding French director Claire Denis as assistant director, and *Down by Law*, like its predecessor, attracted popular appeal in Europe and Japan (Merritt 325).

The success and influence of *Stranger Than Paradise* made it a key film at an important moment in the growth of the contemporary independent scene which soon outgrew Jarmusch’s smaller-scale interests and increased expectations for commercial success of independent films in the U.S. While *Down by Law* and Jarmusch’s subsequent films would not meet these expectations, positive critical response and popularity in foreign markets would continue to prove fruitful. This trend of developing a global presence in terms of financing, production, distribution, and exhibition continued through the two subsequent Jarmusch films, where it reached its apogee.

Phase 2: The Global Courtship of Jim Jarmusch (1989-92)

Mystery Train (1989) and *Night on Earth* (1992)

Whereas Jarmusch's films in the first phase included no more than two foreign characters and received financing from Europe, the films in the second phase include at least four foreign characters and expanded the sources of financing beyond Europe for the first time. The Japanese corporation JVC provided all financing for the production of *Mystery Train*. Berra explains, "In a manner keeping with the laid-back nature of his films, Jarmusch did not aggressively pursue the patronage" of the company, but "was simply contacted by a director of the company who had particularly enjoyed his work and wanted to help with future funding" (101). From *Mystery Train* on, Japanese financing, especially from JVC, would remain a significant source of support for Jarmusch's films, likely because of their continued popularity in Japan.

Set in Memphis, the film's narrative features three story threads, each conveyed separately, that are linked through temporal and spatial simultaneity (they're set in the same basic time frame within a limited geographic range, all converging on the same motel on the same night). All three stories involve the experiences of foreigners in the United States. The first story ("Far from Yokohama") follows two Japanese tourists, teenagers Mitsuko (Youki Kudoh) and Jun (Masatoshi Nagase), through Sun Studios, debates about the merits of various aspects of American popular culture (Elvis Presley vs. Carl Perkins), and romantic tribulations. The second story ("A Ghost") focuses on recently-widowed Italian tourist (Nicoletta Braschi) who sees the ghost of Elvis while sharing a motel room with a motor-mouthed American (Elizabeth Bracco). The final story ("Lost in Space") features a transplanted British man (Joe

Strummer) dealing with a fractured romance by drinking, shooting a liquor store clerk, and accidentally shooting his friend (Steve Buscemi) in the leg.

The case of *Mystery Train* shows that as Jarmusch continued to discover foreign sources of financing, the characters and content of his films also continued to increasingly involve foreign elements. This process could be seen to have culminated in *Night on Earth*, for which Jarmusch received financing from JVC (Japan), Pyramide Productions (France), Le Studio Canal Plus (France), Pandora Filmproduktion (Germany), Channel Four Films (Great Britain), and Locus Solus Entertainment (United States). The film consists of five distinct episodes, all set in taxis, that focus on the interaction between driver and passenger(s). The episodes are set at the same time of night in five different cities: Los Angeles, New York, Paris, Rome, and Helsinki (the film's working title was *lanewyorkparisromehelsinki*). The dialogue makes use of several languages, including English, French, German, Finnish, and Italian. Production crews were hired in each city. The film goes so far as, in the end credits, to list the roles of cast and crew in the primary language associated with each episode. Further, as Suarez notes, the film is contains numerous cinematic homages:

Each episode employs actors or settings associated with some of Jarmusch's favorite directors. Los Angeles and Gena Rowlands evoke John Cassavetes... In Brooklyn, Rosie Perez and Giancarlo Esposito invoke Spike Lee... Armin Mueller-Stahl recalls Fassbinder. Isaach de Bankolé had appeared in the films of Claire Denis [Jarmusch's assistant on *Down by Law*]... Rome recalls neorealism (especially Fellini's poetic-grotesque brand). And in Helsinki, the actor Matti Pellonpää, the names...Mika and Aki, and the blue-collar setting suggest the cinema of the Kaurismäki brothers. (73-4)

One could add to Suarez's observations that such cinephilic homages are reminiscent of a common feature of many films of the French New Wave, another global cinema of interest to Jarmusch. In all of these ways, *Night on Earth* represents a conscious international focus.

Thus, in addition to receiving substantial financing from a variety of international sources, Jarmusch utilizes a formal structure in *Night on Earth* that joins a range of global cinema figures, works, and movements under a single umbrella, while also likely generating public interest in—that is, potential audience for—the film in each of the featured locations. Whether through conscious design or natural progression, with these two films the global outreach that proved fortuitous for *Permanent Vacation* and *Stranger Than Paradise* had developed into a pattern that sustained Jarmusch's work in a manner much more in line with the approach of the European co-productions of Krzysztof Kieslowski (*The Double Life of Veronique* [1991]), Wim Wenders (*Until the End of the World* [1991]), or Aki Kaurismäki (*La Vie de Bohème* [1992]) during this period. However, this pattern would collapse to some extent with Jarmusch's next film. Foreign financing will remain a cornerstone of his production, but in terms of distribution and critical reaction, *Dead Man* represents a stark contrast to Jarmusch's previous experience.

Phase 3: From Indie to Indiewood (1995-2009)

The Singular Case of Dead Man (1995)

Dead Man signaled a departure from the formal and industrial approaches of Jarmusch's previous work in a number of ways. Jarmusch returned to black and white after two consecutive color films, directly engaged with an easily identifiable genre (the western), and worked with his highest budget (\$9 million) thus far. Further, *Dead Man* features a Hollywood star in Johnny

Depp (though in 1995 he was not yet a box office sensation) and focuses its narrative primarily on a single protagonist, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. This section, though, will focus on financing, distribution, and exhibition, particularly in how these areas play out in the experience of working with Miramax Films the film's U.S. distributor.

In a 1994 interview, given in the midst of financing *Dead Man*, Jarmusch discusses the uncertainty of finding financial backers that will allow for his working method, once again demonstrating the tension between business and creative control:

I'm trying to finance my new project, which is bigger, budget-wise, than anything I've done so far. So this one's a little trickier and I'm seeing if I can still piece together financing, or if I have to try to go to one place that will then try to put restrictions on me creatively, which I'm desperately trying to avoid...we're scrambling around trying to finance it by split rights... We have other people in America that have offered to fully finance my next project, but they want to have script conferences or they want to discuss certain creative things. (Hertzberg 147)

Eventually, the financing did congeal, with JVC and Pandora being joined by New Market Capital Group (U.S.) and the Federal Film Fund of Germany, and production proceeded primarily in the American southwest, west, and northwest.

Prior to the film's premiere at Cannes in 1995, Miramax, probably inspired by Depp's bankability, paid \$4 million for the North American distribution rights without having seen the film (Berra 103). Later, Miramax's Harvey Weinstein requested that Jarmusch "cut the film down to what he perceived to be a more marketable length. As Jarmusch had final cut on the film, he refused to change a frame, leading Miramax to 'dump' the film, releasing it in a few cities and investing little money in the home video version" (Berra 103). *Dead Man* was shelved

for a full year after Cannes before Miramax's unenthusiastic U.S. release, but meanwhile the film had been successfully released abroad by foreign distributors in countries like Australia and Turkey (Rosenbaum, *Dead Man* 17). At the New York Film Critics Circle Awards in January 1996, five months before Miramax's U.S. release of the film, Jarmusch "claimed that...*Dead Man* had been seen more in private screenings than it had in public exhibition" (Berra 103). Later he stated that he "did not expect *Dead Man* to be a commercial success. But I wanted it handled in a classy way. And it was handled, as one critic put it, with tongs by Miramax...Ultimately, I felt punished" (Pulver 6). Despite the apparent disappointment in Miramax's handling of the film's release, Jarmusch made the key decision: "...he resisted the attempts to tamper with his vision and settled for maintaining his preferred cut at the expense of a wide release" (Berra 174). This decision seems to a great extent to validate his previous claims to make films without oversight by investors, studios, or other business interests in the film industry. As a result, the film went on to gross just over \$1 million at the U.S. box office.

However, the history of how *Dead Man* has been received by audiences (both critical and popular) provides an interesting example of how short-term concerns about receiving a wide theatrical release and critical acclaim, though desirable, can prove to be not of utmost importance for a film with potential for developing a cult following. During its initial screenings and underwhelming theatrical release, the critical response to *Dead Man* covered the spectrum from abysmal to enthusiastic. The response at Cannes was mixed; the conclusion of the film was greeted with silence (not necessarily a negative), a smattering of applause, and an audience member bellowing from the balcony in a strong French accent, "Jeem...It's [expletive]" (Hirschberg 44; brackets in original). During its theatrical run, the film received scathing reviews from mainstream sources like Roger Ebert (who had admired all previous Jarmusch

films), *Entertainment Weekly*, *USA Today*, and the *New York Times*, while J. Hoberman of the *Village Voice*, Kent Jones of *Cineaste*, Jonathan Rosenbaum of the *Chicago Reader*, and Stuart Klawans of the *Nation*, praised *Dead Man* as Jarmusch's greatest achievement.

Meanwhile, in its few weeks of release, American audiences had very little chance to participate. By the turn of the century, though, *Dead Man* began to appear on numerous lists of the best films of the 1990s and found an audience on home video. At the time of this writing, the film has a 7.7 (out of 10) rating on the popular Internet Movie Database (imdb.com), which makes it the second-highest rated Jarmusch film on the site. In sum, the progression of *Dead Man* from commercial and critical failure to cult favorite and the Jarmusch film to receive the most scholarly attention (Suarez 104), represents the unpredictable range of possibilities for a complex, divisive art film in the current state of the film industry.

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai (2000)

After the larger budget of *Dead Man*, Jarmusch scaled back slightly on *Ghost Dog* with an estimated budget of \$7 million. Financing came again from a range of foreign sources: JVC, Pandora, and Le Studio Canal Plus remained on board, as did German TV, this time the broadcaster ARD/Degeto. Additionally, Bac Films, a French company, joined the team. The basic pattern of financing, distribution, exhibition, and box office results matches that of Jarmusch's films prior to *Dead Man*: funds and distribution from a variety of foreign sources, screenings at a number of film festivals (a Cannes world premiere, a PanAfrican Film Festival U.S. premiere), and modest box office (\$3 million in the U.S., \$6 million abroad). After the Miramax experience, Jarmusch opted for a smaller U.S. distributor, Artisan Entertainment, a firm that until 2005 distributed theatrically and on video a mixture of independent, foreign,

documentary, and cheap, often direct-to-video horror/fantasy films (e.g. *Wishmaster 3: Beyond the Gates of Hell*).

The only notable deviations from the pre-*Dead Man* pattern are the lack of any U.S. production financing (the only other occurrence of this being *Mystery Train*) and the participation of the RZA as the composer of the film's score. Because he is the leader of the popular hip-hop collaborative the Wu-Tang Clan, RZA's participation, and the accompanying soundtrack album release, could easily have brought attention to *Ghost Dog* from potential audiences who otherwise would never have sought out the film. Further, RZA is an interesting choice: as a hip-hop producer for the Wu-Tang Clan, his productions often feature audio samples of obscure Asian martial arts films, while the lyrics often express an ethos inspired by ancient East Asian philosophy. The use of music in *Ghost Dog*, then, represents another engagement with global culture. While the industrial pattern remained largely consistent with Jarmusch's past work, his next two original feature film projects would find him working more closely with American-based financial support in the form of Focus Features, the "specialty" arm of Universal Pictures.

(Sort of) *Coming to America: Broken Flowers (2005) and The Limits of Control (2009)*

To this point in his career, Jarmusch had largely avoided participating with major American companies, particularly the major Hollywood studios, in the financing and distribution of his films. Samuel Goldwyn, Island/Alive, and Orion Classics (the distributor of *Mystery Train*) were small-scale, short lived companies; Miramax, particularly following its 1993 purchase by Disney, was a larger distributor, but that had been an unsatisfactory experience for Jarmusch; and Artisan, a smaller company, specialized in more marginal fare. However, the

independently produced (using Japanese, Italian, and a variety of other funds) short film collection *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003) was distributed in the U.S. by MGM/UA and marked Jarmusch's first partnership with major Hollywood studios. Bill Murray had a role in one of the more recently-shot shorts in *Coffee and Cigarettes* (appearing with the RZA), and Jarmusch next wrote a script centering on a lead character written especially for Murray. The resulting film, *Broken Flowers*, marked not only the first collaboration with a Hollywood star of Murray's fame, but also the first full participation of a major Hollywood studio, Universal Pictures. But even in this case, the parameters of the studio's participation are not clear cut.

Broken Flowers received its financing through France's Bac Films and Focus Features.

The company profile on the Focus Features website states the following:

Focus Features and Focus Features International (www.focusfeatures.com) comprise a singular global company. This worldwide studio makes original and daring films that challenge the mainstream to embrace and enjoy voices and visions from around the world that deliver global commercial success.

Focus Features and Focus Features International are part of NBC-Universal, one of the world's leading media and entertainment companies in the development, production, and marketing of entertainment, news, and information to a global audience. NBC-Universal owns and operates a valuable portfolio of news and entertainment television networks, a premier motion picture company, significant television production operations, a leading television stations group, and world-renowned theme parks. Comcast Corporation owns a controlling 51% interest in NBC-Universal, with GE holding a 49% stake.

There are obvious contradictions in Focus Features' self-description. On the one hand, it situates itself as a purveyor of "daring films that challenge the mainstream"; on the other hand, "its broader place is established in the corporate topography of American-led multinational business" (King, *Indiewood* 240).

As the "specialty" division of Universal, Focus Features is designed to acquire a slate of films that serves a niche market in the film industry. Suarez, writing in 2007, suggests that Focus was "poised to become the main purveyor of art cinema in the United States" (140). The major studios developed specialty divisions primarily as a response to the success achieved by independent films and distributors in the 1980s and 90s (King, *Indiewood* 4). Specialty divisions such as Sony Pictures Classics, Paramount Vantage, Fox Searchlight, and Focus Features were created to develop a presence in a market segment which independents-turned-blockbusters like *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) revealed to have sizable potential audiences despite relatively low costs of production (King, *Indiewood* 4).

Geoff King recognizes the significance of this melding of major studios and edgier independent-like productions, labeling the intersection of the two as "Indiewood". In *Indiewood, USA* (2009), his detailed analysis of this sector (including a case study of Focus Features), the term, and King's conception of this area of the industry, suggests qualities that are both "indie" and Hollywood in terms of industry and film content. Certain qualities of contemporary independent cinema remain, particularly lower budgets, more adventurous aesthetic elements (particularly in terms of narrative, as in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* [Gondry, 2004]), and occasionally more oppositional politics (as in *Three Kings* [Russell, 1999] or *Good Night and Good Luck* [Clooney, 2005]). Concurrently, however, the Indiewood sector benefits from major Hollywood resources, especially in access to major stars (Jim Carrey, George Clooney)

and a better guarantee of wide distribution. Further, all of these specialty divisions play key roles in the theatrical and home video distribution of foreign films in the U.S. (hence the Focus Features International imprint).

How does Jim Jarmusch fit into this configuration? For one, it is important to recall that Jarmusch's films have always been difficult to categorize along the industrial spectrum ranging from experimental to mainstream, and that the positive critical reception of his films and his sustained reputation in the field have created an opening for the films to receive, in general, substantial distribution for low budget independent film. For another, Jarmusch has long stated his primary objection to working with American companies (especially Hollywood studios) was his insistence on complete creative control without oversight from investors. By 2005, the year of *Broken Flowers*' release by Focus Features, the independent film industry that Jarmusch had helped establish with *Stranger Than Paradise* in 1984 had evolved commercially due in part to its continued success, from *Stranger Than Paradise*'s \$2.5 million, to *sex, lies, and videotape*'s \$26 million, to *Pulp Fiction*'s \$107 million domestic box office grosses. As this trend developed, Hollywood studios and independent filmmakers/producers "reached out to each other—the studios starting their indie divisions and the indies responding with their Indiewood films" (Biskind 477). The range of aesthetic and cultural approaches that are possible within the Indiewood sector can possibly best be seen in the two films Jarmusch has made with Focus Features.

Broken Flowers, often referred to as his "most mainstream film" (Hirschberg 20), possesses a rather conventional narrative (at least until its highly ambiguous, down-beat conclusion), was shot in New York, and stars Bill Murray, while *The Limits of Control*, shot entirely in Spain, stars Isaach De Bankolé, contains an oppositional politics, and stands as one of

Jarmusch's most aesthetically challenging films. The former grossed about \$13 million in the U.S., the latter, less than \$2 million.

Thus, even while working in an industrial context much more closely aligned with Hollywood than in the earlier phases of his career, Jarmusch remains difficult to categorize as a filmmaker. He still receives some foreign financing: *The Limits of Control* was partially financed by Entertainment Farm, a Japanese company, and his forthcoming (at the time of this writing) film, currently titled *Only Lovers Left Alive* (due for a 2013 release), will receive financing from Recorded Pictures Company of Great Britain and Germany's Pandora Filmproduktion. It would not be a stretch to situate Jarmusch with filmmakers of global art cinema, such as Pedro Almodóvar, Ang Lee, and Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu, who also receive financing and/or distribution from the major Hollywood studios' specialty divisions. Further, as the next chapter addresses, Jarmusch's films continue to pursue narrative and stylistic approaches that often drift close to avant-garde cinema.

Chapter Three: Narrative and Mise-en-scene (1995-2009)

Jarmusch seems to have directed with his tongue in his cheek, his hand over his heart, and his head in the clouds. The result is weirdly intriguing.

–from Roger Ebert’s review of *Ghost Dog*

Introduction:

The approaches it takes to formal construction comprise one of the crucial ways that global art cinema finds differentiation from Hollywood. If in Hollywood cinema, as Bordwell argues, “cause-effect logic and narrative parallelism generate a narrative which projects its action through psychologically defined, goal oriented characters” (57), then the art cinema typically works against these drives. Consequently, art cinema turns to a slackening of cause-effect linkages between events, “a suppression of action in the Hollywood sense, a consequent stress on character rather than plot” (Neale 13), and characters who “lack defined desires and goals” (Bordwell 58). Regarding the relationship of narrative to these types of characters, Bordwell goes on to relate how:

Characters may act for inconsistent reasons...or may question themselves about their goals...Choices are vague or nonexistent. Hence a certain drifting episodic quality to the art film’s narrative...The Hollywood protagonist speeds directly toward the target; lacking a goal, the art-film character slides passively from one situation to another. (58)

While it is important to recall that the range of narrative structures represented in art cinema, like the range of its other formal and industrial possibilities, is expansive, this drifting quality of the

art film narrative is one of its central and most common characteristics. Bordwell gives examples of art cinema's drifting narrative structure in *L'Avventura* (Antonioni, 1960), *La Dolce Vita* (Fellini, 1960), *Wild Strawberries* (Bergman, 1957), and *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica, 1948). Additional examples from both female and male filmmakers from a variety of countries would also qualify: Agnès Varda (*Cleo from 5 to 7*, 1962), Yasujirô Ozu (*Early Summer*, 1951), Dusan Makavejev (*Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator*, 1967), Lynne Ramsay (*Morvern Callar*, 2002), Aki Kaurismäki (*Shadows in Paradise*; 1986), and Jim Jarmusch.

This chapter will approach several formal characteristics of *Dead Man*, *Ghost Dog*, *Broken Flowers*, and *The Limits of Control* through a discussion of their narratives. All of these films possess narratives that drift, narratives that are accompanied by main characters that represent varying degrees of passivity, narratives that allow for asides and episodic progression. Approaching Jarmusch's films through the prism of narrative drift is effective at revealing the various dispersed formal elements that either influence or are influenced by the drifting quality of the narratives. The style by which Jarmusch's films appropriate editing, sound, and genre influence editorial pacing (in both sound and image) and narrative resolution (or lack thereof), and in turn both allows for narrative drift and is necessitated by the films' interest in representing events that are typically denied representation in Hollywood cinema.

Drifting toward Death

Set in the 1870s, *Dead Man* tells the story of William Blake (Johnny Depp), a Cleveland man who travels west to accept a job as an accountant for Dickinson Metal Works in the town of Machine. Blake's parents have "passed on," and he had a fiancé who "changed her mind," so his

move west seems motivated more by a lack of tethering than by ambition. When Blake arrives in Machine, however, he finds that his position has already been taken. He confronts the owner of the company, John Dickinson (Robert Mitchum), who quickly frightens Blake from the premises, bellowing, “The only job you’re gonna find in here is pushin’ up daisies from a pine box. Now get out!” Disparaged, Blake takes to the local saloon, purchases a small bottle of whiskey, and meets a former prostitute named Thel Russell (Mili Avital). After they sleep together in Thel’s room, her former beau and son of John Dickinson, Charlie Dickinson (Gabriel Byrne), arrives unannounced. As he attempts to shoot Blake, Thel intercepts the bullet, which kills her, passes through her body, and wounds Blake. Blake awkwardly fires at Charlie with a pistol Thel keeps under her pillow, hitting him fatally with the third shot. Blake escapes in his long johns through the window and rides away on Dickinson’s pinto horse into the night.

Sometime later, Blake awakens to find a Native American (Gary Farmer), who later reveals his chosen name to be Nobody, attempting to remove the bullet (“white man’s metal”) from next to Blake’s heart. Meanwhile, Dickinson dispatches a trio of vicious bounty hunters—Cole Wilson (Lance Henriksen), Conway Twill (Michael Wincott), and Johnny “The Kid” Pickett (Eugene Byrd)—to bring him Blake, dead or alive, and to return to him the stolen pinto. The remainder of the film largely alternates between two parallel narratives that show Blake and Nobody traveling, and then the bounty hunters passing through the same territory. Nobody attempts to guide Blake “to the bridge made of waters, the mirror” where he will be “taken up to the next level of the world. The place where William Blake is from, where he belongs, the place where the sea meets the sky”; the bounty hunters attempt to prevent that from happening. Eventually Nobody secures a sea canoe fashioned by a coastal Makah Indian craftsman and

pushes Blake out to sea, at which point Cole Wilson, the sole surviving bounty hunter, and Nobody shoot and kill each other.

This plot summary suggests a fairly straightforward, lean motion picture, but *Dead Man* is anything but that. The skeletal framework of the plot serves primarily as a basic structure to be adorned with a profusion of stylistic flourishes and narrative diversions that imbue the film with a drifting narrative pace, tone, and development that mark it as distinctly different from the Hollywood narrative described by Bordwell.

A central formal element of the film that helps to define the shape of the narrative is the use of editing. The approach to editing, and the use of blackouts in particular, serves a number of purposes in the film. The pre-credit sequence, as Blake rides west on a train, is punctuated by a series of blackouts. The pattern goes: Blake looks at the other passengers on the train, looks out the window at the landscape, and goes to sleep as the image fades to black; as he goes to sleep, the image fades to black, and then fades back in when the pattern repeats. The pattern in the opening sequence establishes the slow pace of the film, a pace that calls for close consideration of the mise-en-scene. Attention to mise-en-scene is also encouraged by the series of shots: as Blake looks at the passengers and at the landscape, the point-of-view shots reveal that each sequence presents new, progressively grizzled passengers and increasingly threatening landscapes. Further, the blackouts lend the opening sequence an oneiric quality that continues throughout the film. Blake is constantly teetering on the brink of sleep, or unconsciousness, or death, and his lapses into these realms are framed by blackouts. Blake's tenuous grasp on consciousness renders him both impassive and passive: he displays very little emotion, comprehension, or drive throughout the film, qualities which, combined with his physical deterioration, make it necessary for other characters and events to act upon him. The oneiric

quality also introduces ambiguity that persists throughout the film: Is Blake awake or dreaming, alive or dead or in some state in between?

Although *Dead Man* is a western, Blake's extreme passivity situates his character in stark contrast to traditional protagonists in Hollywood westerns. Gregg Rickman contrasts Blake's passivity with that of passive protagonists in comic westerns, such as James Stewart in *Destry Rides Again* (Marshall, 1939), Bob Hope in *The Paleface* (McLeod, 1948), and Buster Keaton in numerous silent comic westerns. All of these previous comic western protagonists eventually overcome their passivity or incompetence and, in however absurd a fashion, take decisive and effective action:

It is this ultimate turnabout... that points up the one key difference between the comic hero of classical westerns and the Bill Blake of *Dead Man*—Blake's extraordinary passivity. Marking him off from the comic western heroes as different as Stewart, Hope, and Keaton, Bill Blake drifts (at the end, literally) through the film, impelled this way and that by chance, Dickinson, Thel, and finally Nobody. Throughout the film Blake shows almost no agency whatsoever—he's passive, as even the most incompetent western hero never is.

(393)

Dead Man's denial of the expectations of the western genre in the form of Blake's passivity aligns with its larger project of critiquing the genre and Hollywood's appropriations of it (as the next chapter will discuss). But in terms of narrative structure, Blake's passivity lends the film a meandering, episodic quality that drifts away from goal-oriented drive. Karla Oeler, similarly pointing to the blackouts, concludes, "With its regular fades, *Dead Man* breaks down the building blocks of cinematic narrative and in this manner distances itself from narrativity" (205).

In turn, Oeler continues, “Relieved of the pressure to advance a desire-driven plot, the images of Blake’s and Nobody’s visions demand reflection rather than a passing ‘read’” (205-6). Thus the passivity of the protagonist and the style of the editing are inextricably linked to the episodic progression of the narrative.

The various episodes in the film divert attention from the progress of the plot, as Oeler suggests, and direct it toward close observation of isolated events. In one important episode, for example, Nobody ingests “the food of the great spirit, grandfather peyote.” Blake, once again misunderstanding the significance of events, asks, “Do you think I could have a little bite of it?” Nobody denies his request, explaining that it is not for Blake at this time, and discusses the prohibition of peyote by Spanish colonizers of southern tribes. Instead, Nobody suggests that Blake fast (actually, he gives Blake no option—another instance of external forces acting upon Blake) because “all the sacred spirits recognize those who fast. It’s good to prepare for a journey in this way.” He then leaves Blake alone. The next day, on his “quest for vision,” Blake encounters a slaughtered fawn in the forest; he mixes blood from the fawn’s bullet wound with blood from his own and lays down beside the fawn in a union of man and nature.

The reverence with which the episode concerning Blake’s and Nobody’s quests for vision is portrayed contrasts sharply with the irreverent treatment of the episode that precedes it. In this episode, Blake and Nobody happen upon a trio of fur trappers who have formed something of a family unit. The mother figure is Salvatore “Sally” Jenko (Iggy Pop), a man in drag. Sally reads Goldilocks stories to Big George Drakoulous (Billy Bob Thornton) and Benmont Tench (Jared Harris) while preparing their bean dinner. When Big George tells Sally to “read us a grace from the Good Book,” Sally indiscriminately reads from 1 Samuel 17:46 in the Old Testament:

This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

“Amen!” says the “family.” This passage, appropriated here as a prayer of grace before eating, suggests violence as the source of the family’s—and by extension, the colonizers’—livelihood, and links such violence to religious claims of a right to dominance or ownership of the land. This, along with the episode’s comically grotesque (uneducated, filthy) depiction of the family unit that is meant to civilize the untamed west, points to the hypocrisy of taking land by attempted genocide while proclaiming religious justification.

The two episodes described above do nothing to advance the plot of the film. They are lengthy diversions that differ so wildly in tone—one gentle and reflective, the other grotesque and graphically violent—that they, like many such narrative diversions in the film, require an adjustment to viewing them. The adjustment required by the various episodes reflects the unusual qualities of *Dead Man* as a whole: while it is some ways a western, it is in many ways not like any other western and cannot be understood as such. Bordwell writes that the “viewer makes sense of the classical film through criteria of verisimilitude (is x plausible?), of generic appropriateness (is x characteristic of this sort of film?) and of compositional unity (does x advance the story?)” (57). As art cinema, *Dead Man* requires a radical adjustment to this approach. Likewise, Neil Young’s score (primarily electric guitar and pump organ, largely improvised over three uninterrupted screenings in two days) is jarring at times, perhaps because it is not what is expected in a western and because it is anachronistic, but also because of its repetition and moments of heavy dissonance, distortion, and reverb. While at times the score

aligns harmoniously with the images (as when it interacts with Nobody's singing), at other times it disrupts the pleasure of compositional unity and causes a modification in experiencing the film, at least on an initial viewing. Taken as a whole, though, the dissonance, distortion, and reverb of the score reflect the overall effects drawn from areas of tension in the film: repetition/variation, exaggerated violence/quiet reflection, realism/surrealism, waking/dreaming. The editing, the protagonist's passivity, the narrative diversions, the treatment of the western genre, and the music tend to draw attention away from the progression of the plot and more toward qualities of experience and the underlying cultural and ideological implications. The approach to form in *Dead Man*, therefore, is consistent with that of art cinema and often directly opposed to that of Hollywood cinema. Further, arriving at the height of the commercial success of American independent cinema, the film provides evidence of Jarmusch's adherence to his anti-Hollywood aesthetic and industrial approaches. Appearing five years after *Dead Man*, *Ghost Dog* continues Jarmusch's drifting narrative approach and his use of passive protagonists and episodic blackouts.

Aiming for Death

Ghost Dog (Forest Whitaker), the African-American protagonist from which the film draws its title, is not passive in the same way as William Blake. Ghost Dog is an expert assassin who, finding guidance from the *Hagakure* (the 18th century book of the samurai code), has given himself over to the service of his Master, the small time mobster Louie (John Tormey), who he believes once saved his life. When one of Ghost Dog's assignments goes wrong through no fault of his own, Louie's mafia superiors order Louie to provide information that will allow them to find and kill Ghost Dog. The bulk of the film's plot follows Ghost Dog as he avoids mafia hit-

men, then assassinates them (presumably to protect Louie), and then delivers himself to Louie so that his Master can take his life. While Ghost Dog takes decisive action on numerous occasions throughout the film, he is passive in the that sense that he has subsumed his agency to the service of Louie and the way of the samurai; thus his actions are not his own.

Once again, as with *Dead Man*, describing the plot does little to describe the narrative qualities and style of *Ghost Dog*. The narrative takes many episodic diversions that emphasize close observation, reflection, and character over action and forward momentum. When Ghost Dog is not on the run from or on the trail of the mafia, he is doing one of three things: meditating; talking with Raymond (Isaach de Bankolé), the Haitian proprietor of an ice cream stand; or talking with Pearline (Camille Winbush), a young girl from the neighborhood.

The conversations with Raymond, in particular, provide no plot advancement. Raymond speaks only French; Ghost Dog speaks only English. They nonetheless share a bond. In one striking episode, Raymond leads Ghost Dog to the roof of his building. When they reach the roof, they look across to the roof of a building next door. A man there is in the midst of constructing a ship out of an assortment of urban materials—shipping pallets, car tires, corrugated aluminum panels, and scraps of wood. Raymond exclaims, “What a beautiful thing. But, how in the hell is he ever gonna get it down from there?” This sight raises questions: Why is the man constructing the ship? Does he intend to use the ship in water one day? Is he preparing for an apocalyptic flood? Or is the purpose more along the lines of that of building a ship in a bottle? That is, is the actual building of the ship—the gathering and shaping of materials, the design, the challenge, the focus required, the attention to detail—of more importance than what might happen with the ship once it is completed? Is Ghost Dog, by following the code of Japanese samurai in the context of the end of the 20th century also doing

something of questionable value in order to achieve something of more personal significance?

The film raises these questions, but it provides no clear answers. (Or it does, according to Roger Ebert in his positive review of the film: “It helps to understand that the hero...is crazy. Well, of course he is.” That’s at least a plausible-enough explanation.)

Again in *Ghost Dog*, as in *Dead Man*, the transitions between divergent episodes are marked by blackouts. In this film, though, the blackouts are accompanied by onscreen text of passages from the *Hagakure* which are narrated by Ghost Dog on the soundtrack. For example, one such text contains the maxim, “Matters of great concern should be taken lightly...Matters of small concern should be treated seriously.” Poetic language of this sort, especially because it is displayed as text on a black screen, encourages contemplative interpretation, but could also serve as an explication for the film’s ethos: the seemingly minor, seemingly unrelated events that occur in the margins of the plot are more important than the plot itself. Even when Ghost Dog is on the assassination trail, the film finds ways to drift away from action to observation, as when, his rifle site trained on the mob boss, Ghost Dog is distracted by the sound of a woodpecker. He trains the crosshairs squarely on the woodpecker, looks, and smiles. Even, or perhaps especially, when drifting with the inexorable pull of death, there is space for engaging the small pleasures of life. Both Ghost Dog and the film that features him are not driven by the classical narrative’s goal-driven momentum; instead, the narrative drifts along with Ghost Dog’s whims and daily activities in the manner of art cinema narration.

Just Drifting

On an initial viewing, *Broken Flowers* might appear to be an abrupt departure from *Dead Man* and *Ghost Dog*, especially in that it lacks the stylized violence and genre features of those

films. Further, on paper *Broken Flowers* seems to contain a fairly straightforward, plot-driven narrative: Don Johnston (Bill Murray), an “over-the-hill Don Juan” who became wealthy working “in computers,” receives a pink envelope in the mail just as his girlfriend (Julie Delpy) leaves him. The envelope has no return address and contains an anonymous letter written in red ink on pink paper. The letter, purportedly from one of Don’s many ex-girlfriends, announces that Don has a 19-year-old son who may come looking for him. Although Don seems prepared to ignore the information, his friend and neighbor Winston (Jeffrey Wright), a wannabe amateur detective with “five kids and three jobs,” insists that Don try to discover who the alleged mother of the son could be. This sets Don on a journey to visit each of five women who could possibly fit the bill. The plot could be the material for a romantic comedy, a romantic drama, or a detective story, but the way it is handled by Jarmusch transforms it into an affecting meditation on change and mortality. It accomplishes this through the deep passivity of Don and through its episodic narrative and editing.

In terms of passivity, Don Johnston is one of Jarmusch’s—and one of American cinema’s—most passive protagonists. In one scene lasting nearly two minutes, Don sits on his couch listening to Marvin Gaye, a bottle of Moët and a half-filled champagne glass sitting on the table in front of him. He looks around the room without any interest, looks at the floor, lifts his hand a bit, almost imperceptibly, as if to reach for the glass of champagne, decides otherwise and lets his hand fall. The scene cuts directly to Don sitting in an almost identical position in an airport as he begins his trip. In this scene and the transition to the next one, the editing is crucial in establishing Don’s passivity and loneliness. Except for a brief cutaway to the bubbling champagne, the scene is essentially one static full shot that encourages close observation of the *mise-en-scène*, especially Don’s behavior, to emphasize the inconsequentiality of his abortive

gesture toward the champagne in the solitude of the surrounding environment. The cut to the following scene—unusual in that transitions between scenes in this film are typically accomplished by blackouts—directly creates a connection between Don’s typical passivity alone in his home to the passive approach he takes to the trip. He has been compelled on this journey by Winston, who uses the internet to locate the five women, print maps and directions, and reserve airline tickets, rental cars, and hotel rooms for Don. He also instructs Don to always bring pink flowers to each woman and to look for clues like pink paper and a typewriter. In other words, the journey is of Winston’s design, and Don seems to go about the trip more because Winston went through all the trouble than through any strong desire on his part. Winston tells Don, “I have merely prepared the strategy. Only you can solve the mystery.” He thus compels Don on a journey to satisfy the curiosity that he feels Don should have about his past and his hypothetical son. Like William Blake and Ghost Dog, events and other people, not innate desire or ambition, dictate Don’s actions in the face of his profound passivity.

If the editing in *Broken Flowers* helps to emphasize Don’s passivity, it also aids in developing the film’s meditations on change and mortality. Early in the film, soon after Sherry has left him, Don lies down on the couch and the image fades to black. When it fades back in, Don is lying face down on a pillow, his body stretched the length of the couch like a corpse. A phone call from Winston awakes him, and as he reluctantly answers and talks, he breathes heavily, as if even sleep is too much activity for him. Later, when Don visits the fourth woman from his past, Penny (Tilda Swinton), his unwelcome presence leads to his getting punched in the eye by a male friend of Penny’s. The image cuts to black, fades back in to Don’s car parked in the middle of a field at night, and then cuts to reveal Don, his eye bruised and bloodied, lying supine in the car’s back seat. Across his chest he holds a bouquet of flowers: a corpse in the

back seat of a rented Ford Taurus. The use of blackouts in these two sequences, assisted by the use of props and décor, suggests a loss of consciousness, or death, and the images to which they fade in reinforce this notion.

Similar to Jarmusch's editing style and the protagonist's passivity, the overall episodic structure of the narrative serves to draw attention away from the drive of the plot and toward the narrative's larger concerns with change and mortality. Each of the visits to the five women addresses this in different ways. Laura (Sharon Stone) had a husband who died in a stock car race ("Then Larry exploded in a ball of flames at the track"); Dora (Frances Conroy), once a free-spirited hippie, now sells "quality prefab homes" with her husband Ron (Christopher McDonald); Carmen (Jessica Lange) claims to have developed an ability to communicate with animals when her beloved dog (curiously named Winston) died; Penny lives in a dilapidated home, and there seems to be a suggestion that she once had a child or was unable to have a child (it is extremely ambiguous). The final woman from his past that Don visits is buried in a cemetery, having died five years before in a car accident. Don places flowers on her headstone, sits against a tree, and appears to shed a tear, though it is difficult to be certain because it is raining and because of the trauma his eye has recently experienced.

Between Don's visits to the five women, there are many scenes of him simply driving. While the concept of "driving" or its cinematic depiction might often connote forward motion, the opposite seems to be the case in *Broken Flowers*. First, the lengths of these driving sequences are too long to have the sole function of signaling that Don is moving to the next destination. Instead, these scenes contain images that draw attention to reflections on the past. One reoccurring image, shot through the driver's side window, shows the road ahead, but also, in the side-view mirror, the road behind—a reflection of what has come before within an image that

is driving ahead. Thus the forward motion is always drawn backward into the past. Whether Don changes or learns anything about himself through revisiting his past (and thus whether the narrative advances beyond its original stasis) remains unclear. In the film's powerful and ambiguous final shots, Don runs after a young man he thinks is his son, gives up, stands in an intersection, and watches another young man drive past staring at him. In the final shot, the camera whirls 360 degrees around Don, the void at the center of the film who cannot make up his mind about what he wants. But perhaps he has at least come to the conclusion that he wants—or lacks—*something*. In its episodic structure, *Broken Flowers*, similarly to Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, Fellini's *8 1/2*, or Woody Allen's *Another Woman* (1988), but unlike those films set entirely in the present, develops a reflection on the past, mortality, and questions of identity that feature prominently in global art cinema.

Continental Drift

The Limits of Control presents a narrative that consists of a skeletal plot that provides an excuse for episodic meditations on art, culture, politics, communication, science, perception, and the nature of reality. These are concerns that can sometimes (rarely) be interpreted from feature length narrative films, but in this case, they form the content of the images and the dialogue. That is, instead of arising implicitly from plot or character, here they comprise the explicit content of the film. The plot begins when the Lone Man (Isaach de Bankolé) meets with Creole (Alex Descas) in an airport. Creole gives him a matchbox and a set of keys and tells him, "Use your imagination and your skills." The Lone Man leaves for Madrid and later to Seville and Almeria. Along the way he meets with a series of contacts who speak in riddles, exchanges matchboxes containing coded communications which he eats after reading, visits the Reina Sofía

art museum, meditates, and assassinates a powerful American (Bill Murray) who inhabits a heavily securitized bunker in the desert.

Very little information is provided about who the target is or why he is being assassinated, or who the contacts are or how they're all connected, or for that matter who the Lone Man is. What can be deduced is that the contacts speak a wide array of languages and/or dialects—English, Spanish (Mexican and Spanish), Japanese, Arabic, Creole—and represent a variety of nationalities, and that they all speak to the Lone Man about a range of topics while he listens closely, as if their seeming ramblings contain information he needs to complete his assignment. Through most of the film there is no indication of the nature of the Lone Man's mission, but there are clues that there *is* a mission—the exchange of the matchboxes, the codes, the black helicopter that appears in the sky periodically. But the plot is so minimal as to be nearly non-existent.

Without a plot or well-defined characters to drive the film, what remains is contemplation of the images and dialogue of the episodes and the ways they correspond to other images/dialogue throughout the film. The motif of the stringed instruments provides one useful example that pervades the film. In the opening scene, Creole tells the Lone Man to go to his hotel, wait for a couple of days, and “look for the violin.” While waiting for a couple of days, the Lone Man meditates, listens to a Schubert violin concerto, and visits the Reina Sofía art museum. At the museum, he walks directly to a cubist painting by Juan Gris titled *El Violin* (1916); he stares at the painting for a moment and walks away. In the next scene, while the Lone Man sits at a café, a man named (in the credits) Violin (Luis Tosar) approaches carrying a violin case. Violin is shown approaching from ten different angles and at several different speeds (slow motion, semi-slow motion, standard motion). He tells the Lone Man he believes that

musical instruments, especially those made out of wood—cellos, violins, guitars—I believe that they resonate, musically, even when they're not being played. They have a memory. Every note that's ever been played on them is still inside of them, resonating in the molecules of the wood. I guess, like everything, it's just a matter of perception, no?

Later, on a train to Seville, the Lone Man meets with Molecules (Youki Kudoh) who tells him to wait three days at his next hotel, and then the guitar will find him. Again the Lone Man waits, meditates, and observes until, passing a café, he hears a guitar. Inside the café, a hostess wearing a guitar-shaped necklace seats him, and he watches and listens to a trio—guitar, vocals, dance—rehearse a flamenco piece (“El Que Se Tenga Por Grande” by Carmen Linares) with the lyrics, “He who thinks he’s bigger than the rest must go to the cemetery. There he will see what the world really is. It’s a handful of dirt.” He watches the guitar player place the guitar in a case and then leaves. The next day, a man named Guitar (John Hurt) meets with the Lone Man at a café; he carries the guitar and case from the flamenco rehearsal. After exchanging matchboxes, Guitar says, “You do know that this guitar was owned and played by [flamenco guitar icon] Manuel el Sevillano. It was recorded on a wax cylinder in the 1920s, believe it or not.” The Lone Man later removes one of the guitar strings and uses it to strangle the American target.

As it reappears throughout all formal aspects of the film—its music, its dialogue, its narrative, and its images—the stringed instrument becomes part of the film’s fabric. The cubism of Gris’s violin painting reflects the fractured structure of the film and in turn informs the editing which, instead of using Jarmusch’s usual blackouts, cuts many scenes into numerous angles/perspectives and speeds. And if, as according to Violin’s theory, wooden instruments have a molecular memory of the music that has been played on them, then the guitar string

comes from a guitar that has been in existence at least since the 1920s when el Sevillano recorded with it, presumably passed along by music or guitar aficionados until it is used to strangle one who hates art. A similar weaving into the fabric of the film occurs with other elements such as cinema, which is woven in through direct references in the dialogue to *The Lady from Shanghai* (Welles, 1947), *La Vie de Bohème* (Kaurismäki, 1992), and *Stalker* (Tarkovsky, 1979), and in décor (a poster for *Un Lugar Solitario* [*In a Lonely Place*]—a textual reference to Nicholas Ray's 1950 film starring Humphrey Bogart).

As the Lone Man looks at and listens to his environment as if it were a painting or music or film, the viewer is compelled to do the same. Hence the film becomes a fabric of signs to be observed, contemplated, and appreciated, and the protagonist, as well as the viewer, drifts, waits, watches, and listens. The film develops into an almost non-narrative, audio-visual experience that induces reflections on cinema, music, painting, perception, and the inscrutable nature of reality. *The Limits of Control*, as an art film about art, is as close to the avant-garde, and as distant from Hollywood style, as any film Jarmusch has made.

All of Jarmusch's films from this most recent phase contain elements of what could have been fairly straightforward, plot-driven narratives. However, all of these narratives repeatedly subordinate plot in favor of observing the central protagonists in drifting, episodic ways that often frustrate expectations of narrative resolution. As with most global art cinema, in obscuring the importance of plot and narrative resolution, these films require increased audience participation in terms of closely observing mise-en-scene and interpreting patterns, repetitions, and variations to determine meaning. These films also tend to emphasize the cultural and ideological perspectives to be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives (1995-2009)

I don't think something that's explicitly ideological serves any kind of even subversive purpose anymore in America, because if you make a political statement that is completely direct then you're only reinforcing opinions of people who would agree with you anyway, and the people that don't agree with you won't agree with you—you're not changing anybody's way of thinking. So I feel that I would never make something that was directly political or ideological, yet at the same time I think...the things I plan to make are...not blatantly presented, it's something that hopefully changes the way people think about their own lifestyles or their own values.

- Jarmusch interview (1985) with Peter Belsito (Hertzberg 43)

Everything is political, and what I truly detest in cinema is films that take things for granted, films that passively lead you to believe, consciously or not, that capitalism, racism, greed, the concept of success, Christianity, the family as a consumer unit, etc. are just part of the way things are. That, to me, is dangerous. At the same time I think the only films, or works of expression in any form, that are politically effective are those that ask questions and that cause the audience to ask questions.

- Jarmusch interview (1989) with Luc Sante (Hertzberg 97)

Introduction:

Ever since *Permanent Vacation*, Jarmusch's films have engaged with perspectives of American culture that rely on the presence of characters, often foreigners, living on the margins of the culture. Allie (Chris Parker), the protagonist of *Permanent Vacation*, has no job, no

ambition, no responsibilities, but one day he steals a car to fund an impulsive trip to Paris. The long (over four minutes) final shot of that film shows Manhattan receding in the distance as the ship heads out to sea. Eva (Eszter Balint), the Hungarian immigrant in *Stranger Than Paradise*, apparently loves obscure American music but is perplexed by TV dinners (“That doesn’t even look like meat”). In *Mystery Train*, the Japanese tourists argue the merits of Elvis Presley and Carl Perkins and steal hotel towels, while the Italian tourist, her husband recently deceased, feels trapped and haunted in the U.S., culminating in her being visited by Elvis’s ghost in a ramshackle Memphis hotel. The L.A. episode of *Night on Earth* ends with the cab driver (Winona Ryder) declining an offer to work in Hollywood. Interestingly, with the exception of *Night on Earth*, almost all of the central characters in Jarmusch’s films are without jobs, or their jobs are defined only in the vaguest terms (i.e. the Lone Man in *The Limits of Control* is clearly an assassin, but who he works for and how he gets paid are never addressed). Ambition and success, in terms of careers or power and financial or material wealth, play a minimal or negative role in Jarmusch’s characters’ lives. Thus the values systems at work run counter to those in most Hollywood cinema geared toward classical narrative structure. Through the values represented on screen, the industrial and formal approaches analyzed in the preceding chapters, and the continual presence of foreign and marginal characters, one can identify that Jarmusch’s films attempt to represent alternative perspectives to those of the dominant (usually American) ideology.

While Jarmusch’s films from *Permanent Vacation* through *Night on Earth* could in many ways be argued to be implicitly critical in their cultural, political, and ideological perspectives, the films that follow tend to address these concerns more explicitly. Indeed, critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, recognizing this shift, comments that *Dead Man* is Jarmusch’s first political film

(“Gun” 22). This chapter will examine the cultural and ideological perspectives represented in *Dead Man*, *Ghost Dog*, *Broken Flowers*, and *The Limits of Control*, and situate them in a contemporary global art cinema context. Galt and Schoonover write, “While it may be tempting to regard art cinema’s emphasis on the aesthetic as apolitical, we argue that by connecting the cinematic image to international spaces, it inherently makes a political claim. Art cinema is both an aesthetic category...and a geopolitical category” (20). In addition to continuing to receive foreign financing, Jarmusch’s films during this most recent phase more deeply engage with issues of transnational or transcultural exchange and the resulting ideological implications.

Ecology and Cultural Engagement

The challenges that people face living in a world composed of conflicting or differing interests, mores, and values has been a consistent concern of Jarmusch’s work since his earliest films. The presence of foreigners or outsider characters in alien environments in all of the films serves the purpose of exploring these challenges and the potential benefits of intercultural interaction. This concern for human ecology primarily focused in the earlier films on the interactions between people from different countries/cultures and interactions between people and their urban environments (an exception would be *Down by Law*, where three urbanites find themselves fearfully drifting through the Louisiana bayou after escaping from prison together). However, beginning with *Dead Man*, the ecological concern is broadened to also address interactions between humans and the natural environment, in particular the animals that share that environment with humans. Occasionally the relationships between humans and animals take on mystical qualities in these films in that the nature of such a relationship, though present and sensed, remains ultimately unclear and beyond precise articulation. However, within these films

the ways in which the various characters interact with animal life reflect the extent of their abilities to communicate and coexist successfully within human society.

The first example occurs in the opening train sequence of *Dead Man*. At one point, near the end of the line, William Blake watches as the grizzled passengers—all of them clothed entirely in heavy animal skins—fire at buffalo from the moving train. This shooting of buffalo from the train seems irrational at first because the train will not be stopping to allow the passengers to obtain any of the hides or meat for use; however, some historians have argued that the widespread slaughter and eventual near extinction of buffalo in the mid to late nineteenth century served a rational, if despicable, purpose. Wooster cites numerous U.S. government officials and soldiers who saw the annihilation of the buffalo as beneficial (171-2). Natives were impeding the process of white westward expansion. Wiping out the buffalo, a vital source of the natives' livelihood, aided in decreasing the opposition from natives and thereby allowed the continuation of westward expansion. Thus the natural animal life of the environment provides material to be exploited by one culture for the larger purpose of imposing domination over or terminating another. In slaughtering the buffalo while wearing buffalo hide coats, the people—i.e. the white imperialists—doing the shooting neglect to recognize their own dependence on the animal. Instead, the animal becomes a means for warfare. In *Dead Man*, disharmony with the natural environment reflects discord between cultures.

One moment of harmony between human and nature, described in Chapter Three of this thesis, occurs when Blake, on the vision quest Nobody has thrust upon him, lies down with the dead fawn with a bullet wound and mixes its blood with his. Because Blake's experience with the dead fawn occurs as part of his vision quest, and because the vision quest is one aspect of his preparation for death, the unity that Blake experiences with the fawn can be seen to represent an

identification of the shared existence of human and animal. The mutual experience of death leads to a recognition of the mutual experience of life. Nobody is delivering Blake to “to the bridge made of waters, the mirror” where he will be “taken up to the next level of the world...where William Blake is from, where he belongs”; thus, the vision quest being an important component of his journey toward death, the implication is that the place where Blake is from and where he belongs is also a place wherein a respect for other life has value, a notion which runs counter to the violent colonization of the land by white people.

A similar occurrence appears in *Ghost Dog*. Late in the film, moments after Ghost Dog has killed most of the mobsters in the boss’s country estate, he encounters two white men on the side of the road who have killed a black bear. Asked why they shot a bear out of season, one hunter responds, “There aren’t too many of these big black fuckers left around here.” Ghost Dog asks, “That’s why you shoot them? Cause there’s not that many left?” When the other hunter remarks that “there aren’t that many colored people around here neither,” Ghost Dog shoots and kills him. He shoots the first hunter in the knee and says, “You know, in ancient cultures bears were considered equal with men,” and the hunter responds, “This ain’t no ancient culture.” Before killing the hunter, Ghost Dog says, “Sometimes it is.” This final statement links racism and violence against nature to ancient cultures, while at the same time linking Ghost Dog’s supposedly superior code, the way of the samurai and his respect for nature, to ancient times. The contradiction therein can perhaps be resolved only by reading the scene as a commentary on the innate violence of human beings, a violence that is expressed in human relationships with nature and in relationships between races and cultures.

In fact, the film seems to suggest, there is no difference between the relationships between human and nature and human and human. Earlier in the film, Ghost Dog has been

compared to a bear by Raymond, the Haitian ice cream vendor. Raymond, saying of Ghost Dog, “He’s just like a big bear,” reads from a French textbook about bears. What he reads emphasizes the complex social traits of bears:

The bear is a solitary animal, adaptable to all sorts of climates, environments, and foods. In groups, they share food when quantities are abundant despite their limited social interaction. The bear is a formidable adversary with no predatory instincts at all. But, when surprised or wounded, a bear may attack and becomes very dangerous.

The bear, then, while an animal of solitude, can successfully adapt to living in groups of bears. Of course, Raymond reads in French, so Ghost Dog doesn’t understand his words, but when Ghost Dog avenges the shooting of the bear later, it serves as vindication of Raymond’s identification of Ghost Dog with the bear. So again, as in *Dead Man*, violence against nature reflects violence against different human cultures.

It may be apparent that in both *Dead Man* and *Ghost Dog*, respect for nature is tied to non-white groups of people. This might suggest a stereotypical view of “ethnic” peoples as closer to nature than, or as mere victims of oppression by, white people. On closer inspection, though, the films are more ambivalent. In *Dead Man*, for example, Nobody’s story involves being exiled by the two tribes (Blood and Blackfeet) whose mixed blood he embodies. Nobody explains to Blake that “this mixture was not respected” by either tribe, so he became an outcast, and then one day he was kidnapped by white men who took him east and eventually to England in a cage as an exhibit for white people curious about the American west. When he returned to his people and “they found out who [he] was, the stories of [his] adventures angered them,” and they cast him out “to wander the earth alone,” giving him the name Xebeche (He Who Talks

Loud Saying Nothing). This is why he prefers to be called Nobody. Regarding his backstory, Kilpatrick states, “Nobody is therefore a very complex man even before the film begins” (171). Further, the representation of native cultures is complex: not “an all-purpose metaphor for the oppressed, or a typical noble or bloodthirsty savage” (Kilpatrick 170), but complex cultures trying to find ways to live among other cultures, often resulting in resentment and prejudice.

Ghost Dog, the African-American protagonist of *Ghost Dog*, is depicted as closely connected with animal life throughout the film. Beyond the connections with the bear, Ghost Dog lives on an urban rooftop where he keeps pigeons. He occasionally flies the pigeons, directing their movement by waving a flag, sometimes sleeps next to the coop, and communicates with Louie (the mobster he serves) by messages written on small strips of paper that he attaches to a pigeon he sends to Louie’s home. In contrast to Ghost Dog’s communion with the pigeons, the mobsters seem utterly confused by them. They incompetently attempt to catch the pigeon when it arrives, and later, when they hunt for Ghost Dog on various rooftops, the mobsters look for and kill pigeons (including Ghost Dog’s entire coop). During one of these rooftop hunts, a pair of mobsters encounters a Native American man named Nobody (Gary Farmer), the same character and actor from *Dead Man*. One of the mobsters, unable to distinguish between Native Americans, African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, thinks this might be Ghost Dog. Out of anger or confusion, the mobsters shoot one of Nobody’s pigeons, causing Nobody, who does not get shot, to repeat his line from *Dead Man*: “Stupid fucking white man.” In *Ghost Dog*, Jarmusch creates a direct connection to *Dead Man* through the presence of Nobody and emphasizes the concern in both films for the violence of humans against animals and humans against other humans, while also emphasizing the brutality of white men toward nature and different cultures.

However, *Ghost Dog*'s apparent righteousness is undercut by narrative ambiguity. Prior to the scene with the hunters and the bear, he has killed nearly 10 people, all of them members of a culture (the mafia) depicted in the film as retrograde and on the verge of collapse (e.g. they can't afford to pay rent to the Latino man who owns the Chinese restaurant out of which they operate). If he's killing these people to protect Louie, then it is left unclear how doing this protects him. Is he instead protecting himself against a hostile group of people, or is he taking revenge for the slaughter of his pigeons? Or has he decided that the Quixotic lifestyle he has adopted justifies his killing? In any case, Jarmusch leaves the answers uncertain. Instead, in both *Ghost Dog* and *Dead Man*, both sides of an antagonistic intercultural conflict are presented complexly, which in turn raises more questions for the audience than it answers.

Though less widespread in or central to *Broken Flowers*, the presence of animals in the film again helps to define the extent of a person's abilities to make meaningful connections with the environment in which he lives and the people who populate it. As Don waits to meet with Carmen, the animal communicator, in her office lobby, he peruses the books on the coffee table, all written by Carmen. The titles (*Animal Vernacular*, *Animal Enlightenment*, and *Animal and Identity Issues*) explicitly make a connection between animal-human communication and personal identity. Carmen explains that she had been a successful and busy lawyer, and that she spent her limited free time with her dog, Winston. When Winston died suddenly, her "new ability was this gift, this gift from Winston" to hear when animals speak. Don disrespectfully, or uncomprehendingly, refers to her as an "animal psychic," but she insists she does not read their minds. She *speaks* with them, just as she and Don speak to each other without reading each other's minds. Don's inability to understand Carmen's perspective in this scene, and his inability to accept the concept of communication with animals, reflects his failed relationships with other

people and the world. Earlier in the film, the human Winston, referring to the letter that informs Don he has an adult son, says, “How can you ignore something like this? You need to treat this as a sign...of the direction of your life. Of this present moment. You need to solve this mystery and find out which of your women it was that you impregnated with your semen twenty years ago.” The mystery is not only who the mother of his supposed son is, but also the mystery of his connection with the rest of humanity and his very existence. His misunderstanding of Carmen’s animal communication provides a concise example of how his reticence, disengagement, and lack of curiosity close him off from the other people in his world.

In *Broken Flowers*, and especially in *Dead Man* and *Ghost Dog*, the particular ways in which animals are situated in relation to humans accentuate the larger concerns of the films with problems of communication and cohabitation in environments where interests, values, and mores come into conflict. Further, the ecological aspects of these films are treated with enough complexity to introduce, in the manner of art cinema, ambiguity that encourages (or allows) an audience to explore often unanswered questions. The underlying concern with human ecology persists in other ways in these films and *The Limits of Control*. In particular, the presence of art (including literature, cinema, music, and painting) and processes of transcultural exchange create an opportunity to open doors to positive possibilities for communication and cultural interaction in not only a local but also a global sense.

Art, Transcultural Exchange, and Regeneration

If all of the films in Jarmusch’s most recent phase emphasize the difficulties of interactions with different cultures, they also present possible avenues through which these different cultures can positively interact. The ideas are far from utopian; rather, they suggest that

through art and transcultural exchange of ideas and art, different cultures can find commonality with, demonstrate appreciation for, and acquire new perspectives from one another, and that this can possess a regenerative effect against cultural and ideological conflict.

Dead Man

William Blake, the name of the protagonist of *Dead Man* and also the name of the famous Romantic poet and painter, immediately signals a concern for art in the film. Blake in the film is not familiar with the real life Blake, but Nobody is an ardent admirer of the real life Blake's poetry. When Nobody was in England, he began imitating the white men, "hoping they might lose interest in this young savage, but their interest only grew" until they placed him in school. While at school he discovered the poetry of William Blake: "They are powerful words, and they spoke to me." Nobody quotes the poet Blake often, and the film's Blake mistakes the poetry for "Indian malarkey." Regarding Blake's confusion, Kilpatrick notes that Nobody's quotations of the poet Blake are "what an audience might expect a noble savage to say, and it is wildly funny that they were actually written by one of the icons of romantic poetry, the very English Mr. Blake" (173). As an outcast in his native land, and even as a foreigner in the white society of England where he was held captive, Nobody finds wisdom in the art of a white man who also happened to be an outcast for most of his life in his own culture. He sees in the film's Blake a correspondence with the poet with whose art he found such an affinity, and perhaps this inspires him to guide this "stupid fucking white man" to what he views as a respectful death.

Another way that *Dead Man* suggests a possibility for positive transcultural exchange is through its appropriation of Native American languages. On the occasions when Native American languages—Cree, Blackfoot, and Makah (Kilpatrick 174)—are spoken in the film,

they are, with the exception of Gary Farmer's *Nobody*, spoken by actors from the appropriate tribes and come unaccompanied by translation through dialogue or subtitles (reminiscent of the multilingual end credits in *Night on Earth*). About the lack of translation, Jarmusch said in an interview that he "wanted it to be a little gift for those people who understand the language" (Rosenbaum, "Gun" 21). These instances constitute an address to actual, specific Native American audiences. This small gesture takes on greater significance because it indirectly acknowledges and runs counter to the long tradition in Hollywood films of assuming only a white audience incapable of distinguishing between people and languages of various tribes or nations. In this manner, and by addressing a *contemporary* Native American audience that could possibly view *Dead Man*, Jarmusch resists relegating Native American culture to a mythological past in this film. Instead, the film acknowledges injustice and misunderstanding and embodies a way in which positive cultural interaction may occur.

One of the lines of lines of poetry *Nobody* quotes is, "Drive your cart and plow over the bones of the dead," from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (ca. 1790). *Nobody* directs this line to the film's Blake, which suggests that part of Blake's purpose, his work, in the film is to witness the destruction caused, specifically, by the violence of white colonization, but generally, by one culture's intention to dominate another. Witnessing, in this case, serves as acknowledgment, which potentially develops into understanding. In these ways, *Dead Man* is an anti-western, and as such it implicates traditional westerns in propagating a deceptive mythology that celebrates the creation of the United States without addressing the attempted genocide at its core. As a whole, *Dead Man* serves as a critique of negative uses of art (in this case, cinema, particularly westerns) in addressing intercultural conflict, but it also serves as an example of how such art can be positively utilized, and it accomplishes this by its reconfiguration of the western

genre, through its representation of Native American cultures, and through its appropriation of the poetry of a visionary outsider, the Romantic poet, William Blake.

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai

The central conceit of *Ghost Dog*—that the protagonist adopts a way of life from ancient Japan to his modern American environment—embodies another instance in which borrowing or learning from other cultures can have a regenerative effect. The film never explains why Ghost Dog chose the samurai way of life, or how he became aware of it. However, Ghost Dog periodically narrates passages from the *Hagakure*, the book on the way of the samurai, when they appear on the screen during the film's blackouts, and even lends his book to Pearline before he dies.

Ghost Dog's bookshelf in his rooftop shack contains a number of books, and his conversations with Pearline revolve around their discussions of books. Ghost Dog and Pearline become friends when she shows him the books she carries around in her lunch box, including *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Frankenstein*. The selection of books encourages reflection on their significance: W.E.B. Dubois's early (1903) sociological study of what it means to be black in America; Mary Shelley's monster who, "much like Ghost Dog, is an assemblage of dead parts brought back to life" (Fay and Nieland 222). Further, the selection that Ghost Dog reads from Pearline's copy of *Frankenstein* carries significance: "He [the monster] sprang from the cabin window as he said this, upon the ice raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance." This image recalls the conclusion of *Dead Man*, but it also reflects Ghost Dog's condition: rescued from certain death (he believes), the selection foreshadows his destiny to die for his Master. Finally, Ghost Dog lends Pearline a copy

of Ryunosuke Akutagawa's *Rashomon*, which contains a story ("In a Grove") that, like Kurosawa's film adaptation, recounts a single event from multiple perspectives. In two previous flashback sequences in *Ghost Dog*, the event of Ghost Dog's rescue by Louie has been shown from each of their perspectives: from Louie's perspective, Louie only drew his gun and shot Ghost Dog's attacker in self-defense because the attacker had drawn on him, while from Ghost Dog's perspective, the attacker had drawn on him, not Louie. The conclusion to be drawn here, like its literary and cinematic inspirations, is ambiguous.

In its numerous and wide-ranging literary and cinematic references, *Ghost Dog* extends its concerns to a global scale. The most obvious references are to ancient Japanese samurai culture in the form of the *Hagakure*, the literary and cinematic versions of *Rashomon*, the Romantic literature of Mary Shelley, and the sociology of Dubois. Other references may be less apparent. For example, the method Ghost Dog uses to kill Sonny Valerio (Cliff Gorman) by shooting him through a drain pipe that leads up to Sonny's bathroom sink, references a similar killing in Seijun Suzuki's film *Branded to Kill* (1967), which in turn strongly resembles an old cartoon that one of the mobsters watches in *Ghost Dog*. Also, the white editor's gloves that Ghost Dog wears when he drives and when he does his assassinations reference Jean-Pierre Melville's film *Le Samourai* (1967). Further, Fay and Nieland identify a close visual similarity between the penultimate scene of *Ghost Dog*, where Pearline picks up the gunned-down Ghost Dog's unloaded gun, aims it at Louie, and pulls the trigger, and the scene at the end of Godard's film *Breathless* (1960) when Jean-Paul Belmondo's character is shot (229). These references provide a space to acknowledge their influence on this film, and they represent a gesture of respect for their formal and/or thematic interests. In their globality, the cinematic and literary references of *Ghost Dog* situate the arts as a space where different cultures share ideas, themes,

situations, and images and thus either come to know more about other cultures or use the disparate materials of other cultures in the formation of one's identity. Regarding the interactions between cultures, Richardson notes the film's suggestion that the loss of deep cultural values "as indicative of contemporary American society, something which can only be redressed from without: through activities within its own sub-cultures as well as through interaction with other cultures" (206). This mode of transcultural interaction brings the notion of stable, clearly differentiated cultures/nations into question, which in turn undermines attempts to divide cultures/nations based on perceived cultural or ideological differences.

Broken Flowers

The opening credits sequence of *Broken Flowers* foregrounds the issue of communication that performs a crucial role in the film's exploration of the interactions between people in a society increasingly reliant upon technology for communication. Over a black screen and credits stylized to look like typewriter text can be heard the sounds of a typewriter's keys and carriage return. The next sound of someone getting out of a car is followed by the film's first image—an anonymous, gloved hand dropping a pink envelope into a postal drop box at the edge of a vacant, non-descript parking lot. A postal worker picks up the post from this location and takes it to a sorting center where the pink envelope joins thousands of other pieces of mail in a highly mechanized system of conveyor belts and chutes. Next a mail truck drives away with the post, which is followed by a shot of a jet lifting off into a cloudy sky. As the film's title and cast credits appear in pink upon the image of the cloudy sky, a series of images of postmarks is superimposed over the clouds. The postmarks provide no information regarding location; instead they contain merely numbers (dates, postage prices), wavy lines, circles, dollar signs,

birds, stars. Finally, a postal worker on foot delivers mail to Winston's house, which presents a busy, toy-filled lawn, and then crosses a massive hedgerow into Don's property, which is silent, well-manicured, and considerably more contemporary and more upper class than Winston's. The postal worker slides the pink envelope through the mail slot of Don's front door.

The long trajectory of the single communicative act, the letter, from its composition through its final delivery—via car, truck, box, conveyor belt, chute, another truck, jet, and hand delivery—emphasizes the difficulty and complexity of the communication process, but it also stresses the distance at which Don has placed himself from the rest of the world. The presentation of Winston's and Don's houses both in a single, uncut take, is crucial in this regard. As the camera tracks past the axis of Don's hedgerow, the energetic sound from Winston's yard fades away, and only as the postal worker nears Don's front door do we realize how large this stone structure really is. It somewhat evokes the appearance of a cave in which this disengaged man has isolated himself from the outside world, an evocation reflected by the house's cold, dark, "gloomy" (Winston's description) interior.

In addition to his encounters with the women from the past described earlier in this chapter and in the Chapter Three, the film depicts other ways in which instances of possible communication fail with Don. In his first appearance on screen, Don is watching *The Private Life of Don Juan* (Korda, 1934), a British film adaptation of a French play about an aging Don Juan. Moments later, his girlfriend, Sherry (Julie Delpy) calls him an "over-the-hill Don Juan" before leaving him. Don returns to the couch where the Korda film seems to mock him. Something similar occurs near the end of the film after Don has returned from his journey with a black eye. He wakes up on his couch and turns on the television to an old cartoon involving a

stork and a baby boy, a mocking of Don's failure on his journey to find the mother of his hypothetical son.

However, though movies and television provide no valuable mode of communication for Don, music seems to provide some hope for connection. In an early scene, Winston enters Don's house and, noting its gloominess, turns down the volume of the classical requiem Don has playing on the stereo. Before he leaves, he puts on "that groovin' CD" he burned for Don, saying, "That's nice. Ethiopian sound, it's good for the heart." Later, as part of the packet of maps and hotel and rental car information he gives Don, Winston includes another CD and tells Don it is "traveling music." The music on both CDs turns out to be by Mulatu Astatke, the Ethiopia-born creator of Ethio-Jazz who studied and performed in London, Boston, and New York in the 1960s and 70s. His music is heard throughout the film as Don travels by car to each destination. Astatke is an interesting choice because of the international, transcultural scope of his music, which creates a fusion of Ethiopian and American jazz rhythms and instrumentation. The title "Yerkemo Sew," one of Astatke's songs that appears several times on the film's soundtrack, translates in English to "A Man of Experience and Wisdom," and it seems that Winston, in addition to being excited about the detective aspects of his work, hopes Don's journey leads to wisdom. The CD case includes artwork that appears to have been printed on Winston's home computer: an Ethiopian flag with an LP record in the center where the flag's emblem would be, and written in black marker the words "Don—From Winston." This communicative gesture, delivered from an immigrant to a lifelong resident, implies that Don may find some kind of wisdom by looking at the life he has become so disengaged from through a new perspective, perhaps that of a foreigner. This suggests a regenerative effect of transcultural

exchange of art in that it can provide an emotional, perhaps visceral link to the wider world of possible perspectives for a soul in isolation.

The Limits of Control

In *The Limits of Control*, a series of mysterious individuals from a variety of countries and cultures share sensitive information by using cryptic language and references to film, music, and painting. The information they impart culminates in what appears to be a collective goal of exterminating a man, the American, who before he is assassinated harangues, “You people...your sick minds have been polluted with crap. Your music, movies, science. Fucking bohemians on hallucinogenic drugs...All that shit has poisoned you, and it has nothing to do with the real world.” Beyond his hatred for art, science, and hallucinogens, the film reveals very little about the American. Nonetheless, his wardrobe, his highly secure bunker, his harshly dismissive attitude toward liberal values, and the performance by Bill Murray intuitively suggest an amalgamation of former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney and former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. (The Murray character even calls for a man named Addington in the film, perhaps a reference to David Addington, Cheney’s chief of staff for several years.) If this is the case, then the film represents—in its narrative and its existence as a film—an artistic act against forces that would like to extend an ideological consensus across the range of otherwise subjective perspectives.

However, the politics of the film, which only become clear in its final moments, remain secondary to its exploration of the relationship between art and experience. Creole tells the Lone Man at the beginning of the film that everything is subjective, and throughout the film the Lone Man seems to operate with this knowledge—he looks at and listens to his environment as if it is

all a work of art. The first painting he views in the Reina Sofía museum, Gris's *El Violin*, presents a cubist representation of a violin, which fractures the image of the instrument to show it from different angles and thus suggests the subjective perspectives of perception. The next painting he views is Roberto Fernández Balbuena's *Desnudo*, which depicts a female subject sprawled naked across sheets of cloth. In the next scene, he encounters Nude (Paz de la Huerta) in his hotel room. Despite her attempts at seduction, the Lone Man refuses ("Never while I'm working") and instead merely observes her similarly to his observation of the painting. Later, he stands on a high balcony overlooking Madrid. The camera zooms in on his face, then in on the landscape until the image goes out of focus, and then to his face again. The next cut is back to the landscape as it starts to come into focus again and zooms out slowly until it becomes clear that he is now looking at Antonio López's highly detailed landscape, *Madrid Desde Capitán Haya* (1987-94). The following cut reveals the Lone Man in the Reina Sofía museum, not on the balcony.

The manner in which the film develops correlations between viewing art and experiencing reality works to blur the boundaries between the two. The scene where the Lone Man meets with Blonde (Tilda Swinton) underscores this effect. Blonde's interest is film: "The best films are like dreams you're never sure you've really had. I have this image in my head of a room full of sand, and a bird flies towards me and dips its wing into the sand. And I honestly have no idea whether this image came from a dream or a film." (The image of the bird in a room full of sand comes from Tarkovsky's *Stalker*.) This scene, as if illustrating her point, provides two images—one in which two men carry a bathtub, another in which Blonde opens her umbrella and spins around while walking away—that *seem* like they originate from other films. Further, Blonde mentions Welles' *The Lady from Shanghai* and its final "shootout with shattered

mirrors,” an event that in its fracturing of a complete image again recalls the complex subjectivity of experience.

In these ways, and those described in Chapter Three, *The Limits of Control* seeks to shatter any stable notions of an objective reality and the claims to truth and righteousness that often accompany such notions. As art that is explicitly concerned with the relationship between art and experience, the film repeatedly emphasizes the uncertainty that comes with attempts to define reality. Art can be abstract and may require contemplative engagement which may result in different effects for different receivers. The uncertainty and the questioning engendered by art challenge mechanisms of control because they enhance the ability or desire of potential subjects of control to think creatively, critically, and individually. The film opens with an epigraph from French poet Arthur Rimbaud’s 1871 poem “The Drunken Boat” (presented in both French and English): “As I descended into impassible rivers / I no longer felt guided by the ferrymen.” Jarmusch has said that Rimbaud’s poem “is a kind of metaphor for the derangement of the senses; an intentional disorientation of perception” (“Cultural Glossary”). Under these conditions the individual is left to perceive and interpret anew, to develop a creative and critical acuity unbound from traditional, popular, or prescribed modes of thinking, a notion that is reflected in the final dialogue in the film, “Reality is arbitrary.” The conspiracy of several nationalities in the film, like its references to cinema, painting, music, and literature, is global in scope; thus Jarmusch situates the work of artists as an imaginative force that challenges efforts to achieve strict ideological adherence. The Lone Man looks at the world in the same way he looks at paintings; the ability to engage with art mirrors the ability to engage with life. Regarding global art cinema, Galt and Schoonover note, “Art cinema demands that we watch across

cultures and see ourselves through foreign eyes” (11); learning to engage with art practices this vision and both enables and is enabled by transcultural exchange.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This thesis has situated the cinema of Jim Jarmusch in relation to global art cinema through analysis of industry, mise-en-scene and narrative, and cultural and ideological perspectives. Jarmusch's earliest efforts at finding financing and distribution outlets through to the most recent instances, show he has consistently sought out and relied upon a variety of international sources for support. Recognition at international film festivals and popular response from audiences around the globe—especially in Europe and Japan—have aided in providing Jarmusch with sustaining sources of finance from foreign companies amenable to his methods (like the Japanese corporation JVC, and film companies such as France's Bac Films and Germany's Pandora Filmproduktion, in addition to others). While his films following *Stranger Than Paradise* have received only marginal popular response in the U.S. during theatrical release, they have remained popular internationally, a fact which has enabled Jarmusch to maintain the degree of production autonomy that he demands without the participation of Hollywood studios. His most recent films, *Broken Flowers* and *The Limits of Control*, were partially financed and distributed by Focus Features, the independent, foreign, and art film specialty branch of NBC-Universal. Thus the relationship between Jarmusch and Hollywood studios, like that of other independent and foreign filmmakers, has become recently more complicated. Nonetheless, even under the umbrella of a major Hollywood studio, Jarmusch's films exist in a position—that of the independent or art film—that remains distinct from mainstream multiplex fare. These production/distribution methods have placed Jarmusch in close alignment with the practices of global art cinema.

The significance of this study is its contribution to—and complication of—the current scholarly studies of the global art cinema category. In many ways Jarmusch seems almost ideally suited for this category, as described above. Further, the global art cinema category provides some useful ways to think about the globality that is central to the industrial, formal, and cultural/ideological aspects of Jarmusch's work and the specific historical contexts in which it appears. However, this study has also complicated the category by addressing its limitations. Specifically, the category has not clearly defined the “mainstream” or “Hollywood” against which global art cinema defines itself; the case of Jarmusch's cinema demonstrates the fluidity of such boundaries in that it crosses regularly into both the experimental and the mainstream and has done so even during his recent work with a major studio's specialty division. In sum, I think this study has both contributed to and complicated the global art cinema category while also bringing an original perspective to understanding Jarmusch's cinema.

In terms of form, particularly narrative and mise-en-scene, Jarmusch's films from 1995-2009 have more in common with a wide range of foreign films than with most American, particularly Hollywood, cinema. This is evidenced by analysis of mise-en-scene and narrative in Jarmusch's features *Dead Man*, *Ghost Dog*, *Broken Flowers*, and *The Limits of Control* by examining their use of idiosyncratic editing, passive protagonists, genre reconfigurations, and drifting narratives that consistently draw the films in closer to the features of global art cinema than to the goal-driven and resolution-bound narratives of most Hollywood cinema during this time.

The cultural and ideological perspectives apparent in Jarmusch's recent work situate his films in implicit and often explicit opposition to the values, representations, and ecological concerns of Hollywood films designed to reach mainstream audiences. The concepts of career,

ambition, and financial/material acquisition are either depicted negatively or disregarded, and stereotypes are avoided through the sympathetic but complex representations of characters from a variety of cultures. Further, these films depict the complexity of interactions between different cultures and nations and between human beings and the natural world. These transcultural interactions are often enacted through the presence of outsider and/or foreign characters and display a contemporary sensitivity to anxieties associated with globalization and environmental uncertainty shared on a global scale.

Due to its scope, it has been necessary for this thesis to omit discussion of two additional Jarmusch films appearing during the 1995-2009 period—*Year of the Horse* (1997), a concert documentary of Neil Young and Crazy Horse, and *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003), a compilation of thematically and structurally-related short films shot periodically between 1986-2003. An expanded study could integrate a discussion of the industrial, formal, and cultural/ideological aspects of these films. Neither film could be described precisely as a narrative feature, but this idiosyncrasy may broaden the understanding of Jarmusch's cinema and provide further evidence of its differentiation from Hollywood cinema. Further, while this thesis has analyzed the industrial context of Jarmusch's work prior to *Dead Man*, a larger study could allow for a more thorough discussion of the form and cultural/ideological perspectives represented by these earlier films.

Jarmusch was chosen as the subject to be situated as global art cinema for this thesis in part because so many of his films have explicitly engaged with foreign characters. However, a similar approach could be useful in considering the work of other contemporary American filmmakers within the global art cinema category. Filmmakers such as David Lynch and Gus Van Sant, for example, have regularly made use of foreign financing. Lynch's work in television

may complexify the subject, as may Van Sant's joint theatrical-television partnerships with HBO for *Elephant* (2003) and *Last Days* (2005). Further, Van Sant's occasional alternation between larger-budget, major studio films (*Psycho* [1998], *Finding Forrester* [2000]) and borderline avant-garde work (*Gerry* [2002], *Paranoid Park* [2007], *Last Days*) offers an interesting complication that a study on Jarmusch, who has regularly declined offers from Hollywood studios, largely avoids. Filmmakers like Lynch and Van Sant can often be seen as fitting the industrial and artistic contexts of global art cinema, and their work in television and in direct connection to major Hollywood studios could help to more clearly define the global art cinema category as it relates to contemporary American cinema. Does global art cinema include films produced in part by television companies for simultaneous television/theatrical exhibition? Is it possible for Hollywood films to be considered part of a contemporary global art cinema? These are important questions to consider because they address the fluidity of films, filmmakers, and industries that increasingly operate across multiple media platforms and a range of global aspects.

Finally, Jarmusch's most recent, and many of his earlier films, have much in common with the New Hollywood Cinema of the 1960s and 70s, especially in terms of editing, protagonists, narrative, and genre. Like Jarmusch, many filmmakers during the New Hollywood period (Altman, Coppola, Rafelson, Ashby, Allen, etc.) took inspiration from the foreign art cinema of the preceding decades. However, as the artistic potential of the New Hollywood ceded to the profit potential of high-concept blockbusters, many of the creative interests of the New Hollywood were pushed to the margins. The contemporary American independent cinema arose in this context to carry the torch because financial support from Hollywood became scarce. The scope of a dissertation could provide a space to thoroughly analyze the industrial, formal,

and cultural/ideological dynamics involved in the shift of these concerns to more marginal, independent production.

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Appendix: Selected Filmography

Dead Man (1995)

Director/Writer: Jim Jarmusch

Producer: Demetra McBride

Editor: Jay Rabinowitz

Cinematography: Robby Müller

Music: Neil Young

Cast: Johnny Depp (William Blake), Gary Farmer (Nobody), Crispin Glover (Train Fireman), Lance Henriksen (Cole Wilson), Michael Wincott (Conway Twill), Eugene Byrd (Johnny "The Kid" Pickett), John Hurt (John Scholfield), Robert Mitchum (John Dickinson), Iggy Pop (Salvatore "Sally" Jenko), Gabriel Byrne (Charlie Dickinson), Jared Harris (Benmont Tench), Mili Avital (Thel Russell), Billy Bob Thornton (Big George Drakoulous), Alfred Molina (Trading Post Missionary)

Production Companies: 12-Gauge Productions, JVC Entertainment Networks, Newmarket Capital Group, Pandora Filmproduktion, FFA Berlin Filmboard/Berlin-Brandenburg/Filmstiftung NRW

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai (2000)

Director/Writer: Jim Jarmusch

Producers: Richard Guay, Jim Jarmusch

Editor: Jay Rabinowitz

Cinematography: Robby Müller

Music: RZA

Cast: Forest Whitaker (Ghost Dog), John Tormey (Louie), Cliff Gorman (Sonny Valerio), Henry Silva (Ray Vargo), Richard Portnow (Handsome Frank), Tricia Vessey (Louise Vargo), Victor Argo (Vinny), Isaach De Bankolé (Raymond), Camille Winbush (Pearline), RZA (Samurai in Camouflage), Gary Farmer (Nobody)

Production Companies: Plywood Productions, Bac Films, Canal+, JVC Entertainment Networks, Pandora Filmproduktion, ARD, Degeto Film

Broken Flowers (2005)

Director/Writer: Jim Jarmusch

Inspired by an idea from: Bill Raden, Sara Driver

Producers: Jon Kilik, Stacey Smith

Editor: Jay Rabinowitz

Cinematography: Frederick Elmes

Music: Mulatu Astatke

Cast: Bill Murray (Don Johnston), Julie Delpy (Sherry), Jeffrey Wright (Winston), Sharon Stone (Laura), Frances Conroy (Dora), Jessica Lange (Carmen), Tilda Swinton (Penny), Mark Webber (The Kid), Alexis Dziena (Lolita), Christopher McDonald (Ron), Chloe Sevigny (Carmen's Assistant), Chris Bauer (Dan), Larry Fessenden (Will)

Production Companies: Five Roses, Focus Features, Bac Films

The Limits of Control (2009)

Director/Writer: Jim Jarmusch

Producers: Gretchen McGowan, Stacey Smith

Editor: Jay Rabinowitz

Cinematography: Christopher Doyle

Cast: Isaach De Bankolé (Lone Man), Alex Descas (Creole), Jean-Francois Stevenin (French), Luis Tosar (Violin), Paz de la Huerta (Nude), Tilda Swinton (Blonde), Youki Kudoh (Molecules), John Hurt (Guitar), Gael García Bernal (Mexican), Hiam Abbass (Driver), Bill Murray (American)

Production Companies: PointBlank Films, Focus Features, Entertainment Farm