

THE CENTRE FOR KOREAN RESEARCH PROUDLY PRESENTS

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***The Optics of  
Mutant Vectors:  
Run-away  
Neoliberalism in  
Post-IMF Korean  
Science Fiction  
Cinema***



***by Dr. Haerin Shin  
Vanderbilt University***

***Friday, February 7th, 2020  
3:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.***

***Room 120, C.K. Choi Building  
1855 West Mall V6T 1Z2***



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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
School of Public Policy and Global Affairs  
Institute of Asian Research

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# ***The Optics of Mutant Vectors: Run-away Neoliberalism in Post-IMF Korean Science Fiction Cinema***



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## **ABSTRACT**

Exploring South Korean cinema in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, Joseph Jeon observes the use of “secondorder representations” – the fantastic and/or technologically mediated means of instantiation – as a way of diagnosing the problematics of economic institutions in *Vicious Circuits: Post-IMF Cinema and the End of the American Century* (2019). Indeed, many films from the early 2000s exhibit a growing awareness of their place in the global cinemascapes, enlisting but also bending Hollywood conventions to feel out the socio-economic ruptures that troubled the triumphant narrative of post-IMF restitution. Inspired by, yet building further on, Jeon’s analysis so as to identify a new breed of affective politics that emerged in the 2010s, this essay examines *Train to Busan* (2016), *Snowpiercer* (2013), and *The Heavenly Creature* (2012) to illuminate what I call the mutant vectors of run-away neoliberalism in post-IMF Korean science fiction cinema, whereby the operational logic of reclaimed prosperity belies a conflicted sense of political consciousness etched across the mediasphere. Arriving decades after the nation’s near-brush with ruin, the three films’ optics recalibrate the focus of apocalyptic imaginary from the specters of institutionalized malfeasance to the rhetoric of individual agency and its discontent as the driving force behind not only economic resurgence but also the country’s newly acquired status as a global trend-setter. Tropes of the uncanny such as zombies, humanoid substrates, and the subaltern disintegrate the boundary between victim and victimizer, gesturing to the greatest fear of all, betraying the fear of the other within, rather than an exogenous alterity without.

## **BIO**

Haerin Shin is an assistant professor of English, with secondary appointments in Asian Studies and Cinema & Media Arts. Shin works on late twentieth and twenty first century fiction and media across American/Asian American/Korean/Japanese literature. Her research focuses on telepresence technology, digital/visual media aesthetics, and the ontology of alterity concerning race and ethnicity. Past and forthcoming publications include essays on techno-Orientalism; the affective contours of apocalyptic and disaster fiction and film; cyber fandom and trolling; alternative temporalities in digital film techniques; posthuman race politics and spirituality, etc. Currently wrapping up her first book, *Technology of Presence: Being and Reality in the Age of Cyberculture*, Dr. Shin is beginning to work on her second project on Asian American speculative fiction, tentatively titled *Technology of Alienation*.



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