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The Temporality and Politics of Language Lost and Found. Cinema, Dementia and the Entangled Histories of Singapore

This essay looks at *3688* (R. Tan, 2015), a Singaporean film which tells the story of a daughter's struggle with caring for her father, Uncle Radio, who is living with dementia.¹ In the film, Uncle Radio spends most of his time wandering around his housing estate attempting to get his radio receiver fixed so that he can listen to some Cantonese and Hokkien programmes, forgetting that these shows have been off the airwaves for more than three decades.² I will argue that through Uncle Radio's dementia, the film explores issues of the nation(al) and its relation to Singapore's fraught and violently forged language landscape. Beyond that, the film also gestures towards larger transnational cultures and histories by invoking spectres of (post)colonial negotiations and imaginaries. In this essay, I suggest that *3688* uses dementia and the language mixing the illness entails for the film's central character to develop what David Martin-Jones (2019, 3) describes as "a hesitant ethics," where an array of transnational histories – "histories which pre-exist, or impact across, national borders" – surfaces. They challenge the audience to apprehend the inability to know (hence the hesitation) the multiple histories across the world.

In analysing *3688*, this essay examines the temporality of language lost and found as suggested by the image of a narrative about dementia. In general, a person living with dementia has a complex relationship with language, often experiencing a form of aphasia (Sabat 2001; Kindell et al. 2017), using "the wrong language for the setting or interlocutor" or producing what appears to be

¹ This essay has benefitted from conversations with David Butler and Felicia Chan.

² *3688* is directed by Royston Tan, a Singapore director who found notoriety and success both internationally and locally through his films that work to aestheticise Singapore's disappearing past. The title continues a tradition of Tan's to play with numbers in naming his films. The film is set in the housing estates of Dakota Crescent, which is one of Singapore's oldest, built in 1958. In July 2014, the Singapore government earmarked 15 out of the 17 blocks of flats in Dakota Crescent for redevelopment and the residents were given until the end of 2016 to move out of the area. *3688*, then, can be seen as a film that attempts to capture the present before it is relegated to the past while also bringing forgotten elements of the past back into the present. The film did very well locally and became the most successful local film released outside of the Chinese New Year period in 2015. It was also distributed and exhibited across parts of East and Southeast Asia.

an inappropriate blend of their languages in the case of bi- or multilingualism (Paradis 2008, 219), and having to find different ways to communicate verbally and non-verbally (Örülv and Hydén 2006; Hamilton 2019). Much of this research is couched in a form of melancholia that, according to Helene Moglen (2008, 302), corresponds with “Freud’s vertical model of mind, to which repression is fundamental,” where much of the work is focused on “the retrieval and working through of material that has been forgotten or disavowed,” and where research into language and dementia is primarily focused on finding better ways to communicate with people living with the condition.

As I will elaborate, this approach towards language and dementia presupposes an attitude towards time that is heavily predicated on linearity where the past is relegated to a separate temporal realm from the present and where the person living with dementia, because of the ‘loss’ of language, is increasingly seen as out of sync with the homogeneity of clock time. Through a discussion of 3688, I propose a different viewpoint: I will argue that the person living in a multifarious relationship with language due to dementia offers an epistemological way to think through the discontinuous and heterogeneous ways multiple pasts and presents might come together and negotiate, and I articulate this concern with language and time in relation to notions of nationhood, exploring Benedict Anderson’s proposal that language has the capacity to build “particular solidarities” (2006, 133).

Unlike the work of scholars such as Raquel Medina (2018), Amir Cohen-Shalev and Esther-Lee Marcus (2012), dementia in/and cinema is not understood here through the framework of representation and cultural metaphor, where dementia in film is comprehended as mediated by form. Such approaches to cinema as a representational medium tend to “assume that films are secondary and that the truly important stuff of life happens outside films and without them” (Rushton 2011, 8). Instead, I come from a Deleuzian viewpoint that – according to Patricia Pisters (2015, 125) – thinks of cinematic audio-visual images as “part of the fabric of the world that is woven between screens, bodies, brains and nonhuman phenomena.” What is on screen is what is part of the world and, in turn, the temporalities negotiated by the person living with dementia (on and off screen) are also entangled with the temporalities negotiated by the nation and beyond. Put differently, films about dementia, through their particular relationship with language, become a way to bring the nation and the world together as the pasts and presents of multiple worlds coalesce.

1 Dementia as ‘mistranslation’

From the beginning, 3688 indicates that, for Uncle Radio, the line between the past and present is not as clear cut as it appears. In the opening sequence, a young Uncle Radio walks down the corridors of housing blocks asking the residents whether they want to place a subscription for the commercial radio Rediffusion. Uncle Radio’s hair is jet black, he is wearing a peach-coloured shirt and he is carrying a radio receiver. As he walks, “Qiao qiao men,” an extremely popular Mandarin song from the late 1970s and 1980s by Taiwan singer Feng Fei Fei plays – apparently as source music from the radio – and Uncle Radio whistles along to bits of the tune. In addition to these features, the *mise-en-scène* is tinted with a hint of sepia, all in all strongly suggesting that this moment is set in a nostalgic past.

As Uncle Radio carries out his door-to-door routine, the film cuts to a shot of two children at a table with their mother. Uncle Radio’s voice enters the frame as he asks them whether they want to subscribe to the radio station. The film cuts to a reverse shot of Uncle Radio asking the question and then cuts back to the shot of the family. The boy says to his mother – in a heavily American-accented Mandarin – that he does not want the radio but a smart TV, and the mother looks back at Uncle Radio with a confused expression on her face. The sequence is still sepia tinted, which would typically suggest that this moment is in the same timeline – in the past – but this appears not to be the case. The boy’s heavy American accent is not similar to any of the Mandarin accents heard in the film thus far, and he is asking for a Smart TV, a technological advance from the radio receiver that Uncle Radio is carrying. In other words, at this instant, there is a hint of temporal collision between Uncle Radio in the past and the family in the present. While the sepia tone that colours the *mise-en-scène* at this moment does not indicate a shift in temporality, it does, however, suggest that the sequence is seen through the eyes of Uncle Radio, a notion furthered by placing Uncle Radio and the family in separate frames through shot / reverse shot editing.

The film then cuts to Uncle Radio speaking to another woman. Here, the camera is placed behind his back looking through the window grilles into a woman’s flat. Uncle Radio’s hair is grey, and he is wearing a white T-shirt. The sepia tint is gone, and the colour scheme returns to the same one that is used throughout the majority of the film. This is to say, the film is now back in the present as Uncle Radio and the woman share the same frame. The woman rejects Uncle Radio’s query and claims that she only listens to radio on the internet nowadays. The film cuts back to Uncle Radio looking confused and, as this happens, the music slowly fades out, and the diegetic sounds of Uncle Radio’s surroundings fade in, implying that the song has been (perhaps) playing in his

head all this time and did not come from the radio at all. Very quickly, then, the film establishes the multiple temporalities as experienced by Uncle Radio. As filtered through his viewpoint visually and aurally, Uncle Radio's past and present bleed into each other – he is both in modern-day Singapore *and* he is in the Singapore of the 1970s and 1980s.

Here, the coincidence of the past in the present in the person living with dementia might signal that character as being out of time. As Bliss Cua Lim (2009, 14) observes, this attitude towards the anachronistic presence or survival of the past “is often translated as a relic or vestige of a prior developmental stage, something that has been superseded but stubbornly returns,” and, as such, “the survival of the past tends only to shore up the cachet of progress rather than to critique it.” In other words, the presence of the past as anachronistic permeates the notion that the present – the here and now – has developed into a more advanced version, and this understanding of linearity has significant ramifications, not least because it tends to position people living with dementia as out of tune with the rest of society.

Reconsidering this approach towards time, Lim (2009, 14) proposes that we think of a world that resists the universalising of homogeneous clock time, a world where apparently immiscible times, times that “never quite dissolve into the code of modern time consciousness,” coalesce. For Lim (31), these immiscible times come together and are surfaced through a mode of mistranslation that operates “between two asymmetrically ranked codes,” between, on the one hand, the linearity of clock time and, on the other, the heterogeneous times where pasts and presents are coeval. According to Lim, all attempts to articulate the multiplicity of times and temporalities will be “betrayed by language,” for “language naturalizes the misconstrual of time as space.” Clock time, Lim suggests, “is a language” whose “hegemony is naturalized as universality” (18). As such, to think about history and time as a continual progression of past to future is to translate heterogeneity into homogeneity because the different ways of conceiving time that do not dissolve into modern time consciousness are relegated to the past and to a separate temporal realm. In turn, to acknowledge a world where multiple times and temporalities coalesce is to mistranslate the language of time. According to Lim (32), the act of mistranslation alludes to “the violence of this translation,” where different cultures and stories are subsumed under the Western-centricity of clock time, and to gesture towards that uncanny “trace of containment and excess” where past and present can, and do, coexist.

Seen from this perspective, the person living with dementia, with their multifaceted relationship to language and time, can be understood through the framework of ‘mistranslation.’ As the sequence from 3688 analysed above shows, the past and the present are never quite as neatly separated in Uncle Radio's lived

time(s); rather, the past is *always* in the present, in one form or another, and these seemingly immiscible temporalities come together to negotiate, in turn bringing to the surface – making the audience know (or become aware of their lack of knowledge about) – an array of transnational histories and pasts. Take, for example, the radio company Rediffusion that Uncle Radio represents as he walks around the housing blocks at the beginning of the film. On one level, because of Uncle Radio's dementia, the song that plays cannot be quite attributed to the radio, to his psyche or to the film's score, summoning up, to borrow a concept from Michel Chion (1994, 129), an acousmatic quality that renders the song “neither inside nor outside the image.” The music's indeterminacy, Rey Chow (2014, 114) argues, has “a phantom existence,” reinscribing, producing, extending and proliferating the traces of voice, consequently highlighting the multiplicity of different temporalities that are present.

On another level, the radio company Rediffusion opens the audience up not just to Singapore's local history but also to wider transnational histories connected with the radio receiver that Uncle Radio carries with him. The past that surfaces (or is hinted at) through the person living with dementia in 3688 is not just his but is also part of a wider network of entangled pasts. Founded in 1949, Rediffusion Singapore, a subsidiary of a London-based broadcasting company, was Singapore's first commercial cable radio station. From its inception, Rediffusion gained huge success and popularity with the people living in Singapore, in part due to its effective subscription model. Paying five dollars a month, the subscribers were given a radio receiver to tune in to the programmes. This was significantly cheaper than buying a radio, and communities could pool money for the monthly subscription fees. Rediffusion was popular for its programmes in various Chinese languages and, as Chan Kwo-bu and Yung Sai-shing (2005) observe, these programmes helped bring the many disparate Chinese communities in Singapore together. In other words, the radio station, because of its linguistic plurality, played a significant role in the nation's formative years; however, Rediffusion's eventual decline and neglect from about 1982 onwards, again because of its multilingualism, *also* contributed to an aspect of the nation's search for a postcolonial identification that was accompanied by a desire for linguistic homogeneity. To portray Uncle Radio as so entwined with Rediffusion, not least because of his insistence that the radio company is still broadcasting in the film's present day (and despite our knowledge otherwise), is thus to gesture towards an important aspect of local history and a specific period of Singaporean nation building. Beyond that, the radio receiver also points to a larger network of transnational histories: in Britain, Rediffusion was closely linked with the rise of the television network Independent Television (ITV); in Hong Kong, Rediffusion was not only an important wired radio station but also became the first television

station of a British colony; and Rediffusion was, for almost 30 years, the only radio station in Barbados. In other words, the temporalities of Singapore as evinced by the person living with dementia are deeply entangled with the temporalities across a world of cultures and a range of (post)colonial histories.

2 Singapore's language landscape and the (post)colonial world

In 3688, not only does Uncle Radio's dementia regularly catalyse a stroll around his housing estate trying to convince people to subscribe to Rediffusion; it also results in his relentlessly repairing his radio receivers in the hopes of listening to the popular Cantonese and Hokkien programmes, not realising that these shows have been off air for decades. In one scene, Uncle Radio, while working on a radio receiver, has a quick exchange in Mandarin with his daughter. She asks him to stop repairing the receivers because Rediffusion is no longer broadcasting. Immediately, Uncle Radio gets angry and tells her off for forgetting her roots and disrespecting him.

Throughout their exchange, Uncle Radio's angry speech is peppered with various temporal markers. Uncle Radio refers to all the hard work that he had done in the past bringing up his daughter. When responding to the idea that he stopped working, he suggests that if he stopped, they will not be able to put food on the table in the here and now. When ranting about the radio not working, he refers to the radio programme as if it is ongoing. Thus, like the opening scene of the film, the temporalities that Uncle Radio experiences here are presented as contemporaneous. To this end, despite his use of Mandarin to communicate, the multilingual past associated with Rediffusion is brought to the fore by Uncle Radio's dementia, and his layered relationship with language and time offers an entry point into Singapore's buried/inaccessible transnational history and historiography.

Below, I will provide an impressionistic narrative of modern Singapore's language landscape to contextually ground my argument. For my purposes, I limit my discussion of modern Singapore to the period from 1819 onwards, when Stamford Raffles arrived and began turning Singapore into a British Crown colony. In the process of colonisation, Singapore was positioned as a free port, a status that brought about huge waves of (in some instances, forced) migration from the rest of the world – from China, the Malay Archipelago, the Indian subcontinent, Europe, Armenia and the Afro-Caribbean regions, to just name a few areas – reifying the island's status as a cosmopolitan polity where multiple languages and approaches

towards languages come together. The Chinese diaspora comprised the largest portion of this diverse group of migrants in Singapore.³ For the longest time, this diaspora, from all parts of China, spoke a variety of vernaculars like Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew, Hainanese and Hakka. Mandarin, the vernacular most associated with the Chinese language today, was not commonly spoken by the Chinese diaspora in Singapore. When the Republic of China made Mandarin the official language of education in 1956, only about 0.1 percent of Singapore's population spoke it (Tan and Goh 2011, 615).

In 1959, Singapore gained full internal self-governance from the British (in large part due to Singapore being captured by Japan during World War II) and, in 1963, Singapore merged with Malaya, Sabah and Sarawak to form the Federation of Malaysia. This merger was short lived and tumultuous: the *Konfrontasi*, where Indonesia, in protest at the inclusion of North Borneo (now Sabah) and Sarawak as part of the federation, violently clashed with Malaysia; both the United Malays National Organisation and the People's Action Party, the respective ruling parties of Malaysia and Singapore, held different attitudes towards governance and vigorously campaigned to kick the other out of office; and there were significant racial tensions between Malaysia and Singapore, with one of the worst race riots experienced by Singapore in 1964 killing 22 people and injuring 454 more (Low 2001, 431).

In 1965, Singapore was expelled from the federation and gained independence. Today, despite Malay being the official language of Singapore, it is not spoken by the majority of the people living there. Instead, English is the *lingua franca* of the nation, and the ethnic Chinese population predominantly speaks Mandarin (and English).⁴ In 1979, the Singapore government launched the Speak Mandarin Campaign in the hopes of stamping out the other Chinese vernaculars. For Ying-Ying Tan and Irving Goh, Mandarin was chosen not only to align the nation closer to the People's Republic of China, but, as it was a "relatively neutral linguistic idiom" in Singapore, for so few in the Chinese diaspora spoke it, the vernacular became a useful political tool to homogenise "the linguistically heterogeneous Chinese population" (Tan and Goh 2011, 615).

The Speak Mandarin Campaign forcefully and derogatorily labelled the other Chinese languages as dialects and, in 1982, only Mandarin was allowed on television and radio while the other non-Mandarin vernaculars were banned. As a

3 In 1824, for instance, there were 3,317 Chinese migrants living in Singapore, a number which increased exponentially to 86,800 in 1881. Today, the ethnic Chinese make up about three-quarters of the nation's population (Lai 2011, 153).

4 The local patois, Singlish – Singapore English – is an interesting amalgamation of the different cultures, languages and histories of Singapore.

result, the subscription revenue of Rediffusion nosedived, and the station closed in 2012. This ban of the non-Mandarin vernaculars on television and radio, alongside the teaching of Mandarin Chinese as a subject in schools, resulted in a linguistic gulf between the older and younger generations of Chinese Singaporeans, and this disconnect was acknowledged by the Singapore government when, in 2003, the country experienced a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak. The government temporarily allowed all Chinese vernaculars back on television and radio so as to ensure as many people as possible – including people who had been violently left behind as the nation attempted to forge a new sense of postcolonial national identification – were exposed to the health advisories (Goh and Tan 2007).

Given this long history, the control of language played an important role in Singapore's colonial/postcolonial identifications. Pierre Bourdieu (1982, 45), discussing how French became the official language of France and its colonies, writes that the “official language is bound up with the state, both in its genesis and in its social use.” For Eugene K. B. Tan (2007, 94), the language policies adopted by post-independence Singapore were “premised on particularistic ideas of culture vis-à-vis political governance and the economic imperative of achieving high economic growth rates.” In other words, they fed into the national narrative of Singapore as a vulnerable state where its only resources are human beings – hence, people needed to be brought together through whatever means possible so that the nation could survive and thrive as an economic entity. To this end, the linguistic policies of Singapore, of which the Speak Mandarin Campaign is emblematic, left behind a large portion of Chinese Singaporeans as the nation was coerced to begin to imagine itself differently. The boy's American-accented Mandarin at the beginning of 3688 points towards another linguistic and cultural consequence of Singapore's deliberate positioning as a gateway between the West and the non-West in an increasingly globalised world.

In 3688, Uncle Radio belongs to this early generation of post-independence Chinese Singaporeans who were encouraged (or forced) to take up Mandarin. Although he chiefly speaks in Mandarin throughout the film, as his dementia advances, he begins to speak other Chinese vernaculars too, forging a new kind of communication with the people around him and the radio culture he holds dear, in turn allowing the histories that were violently buried as the state attempted to forge a new postcolonial identity to come to the fore. In one of his wanderings around the housing estate, Uncle Radio enters the flat of a woman using a wheelchair, who is also coded as living with dementia, and they enter into a conversation about needing to fix their radio receivers so that they can listen to the Rediffusion programmes again (which, to both characters, are still on air). In this exchange, where both the past and present of Uncle Radio and

the woman coexist, the two people who live with dementia converse in Malay, Mandarin, Hokkien and Teochew, easily moving from one language to another with no hint of the linguistic hierarchy associated with these languages today.



Figure 1: Uncle Radio and the woman conversing in multiple languages in *3688* (Tan, 2015).

Language, as understood by Bliss Cua Lim (2009, 17), always betrays the heterogeneity of time, where various “temporal rhythms, newness of becoming, and the experiences and emotions registered in the depths of the self, are all objectified and made equivalent by language.” In other words, for Lim, language is a scene of times and temporalities lost, where to be in the symbolic world is to lose access to the heterogeneity and discontinuities of time. From a different viewpoint, Chow suggests that language as discourse can be thought of “as an assemblage of discontinuous, lived experiences” or as a network composed of “the resonances, connotations, associations, and memories (voluntary or involuntary) that, having been uttered and heard many times, cling to or hover around even the most simple individual speech acts” (2014, 53). As she puts it differently, language’s “appearance at a particular moment in time – its condition of being found, so to speak – is often an index to a vast subterranean, even if as yet invisible and inaudible, agglomerate of discourse relation” (56). That is to say, unlike Lim’s view that (the appearance of) language always amounts to a sense of loss of plurality, Chow’s argument is that language is always discontinuous and always gesturing towards the multiplicity of times and temporalities.

For my purpose in this essay, I think there is much to be gained in using Chow's ideas to nuance Lim's notion of mistranslation in order to further my arguments about dementia and history. For Chow, language is always haunted by other temporalities, variously surfacing and highlighting the past(s) vis-à-vis the present, drawing parallels with Moglen's work on the horizontal model of psychoanalysis (as compared to Freud's vertical model of repression), where language can be understood as comprising "the discontinuous yet persistent threat of our identities, which are not integrated, which are not merely split, and which can neither be reduced to nor separated from the limitations and requirements of the body" (2008, 304). Seen from this angle, language, lost *and* found, is always a negotiation between homogeneity and heterogeneity. In the same way the blurred temporalities of the person living with dementia can be understood as a mistranslation that allows the past to surface in the present, language(s) used (or unused) by the person living with dementia becomes an index of the multiple temporalities that are coeval and is, too, a way in which multiple entangled transnational histories are brought to the fore. On the one hand, in 3688, the two characters living with dementia conversing about Redifusion in Malay, Mandarin, Hokkien and Teochew point towards Singapore's complicated colonial/postcolonial imaginations and policies and the ways the nation's linguistic transformation and legacy have been affected by the flows of other cultures into the island. On the other hand, the conversation also gestures towards how the ramifications of the island's cultural and linguistic landscape emanated to other nations and polities.

3 Dementia and the entangled spectres of Singapore's (cinematic) past

To elaborate on one way to understand the conversation between the two characters living with dementia as highlighting the historical flows of culture out of Singapore, I turn to an exploration of the history of Singapore and Singapore cinema in relation to world cinema. Singapore's local filmmaking culture is often separated into two seemingly separate periods: pre-1972 and post-1995 (Millet 2006; Uhde and Uhde 2010; E. Lim 2018). In the 1920s and 1930s, two major film companies, Shaw Brothers and Cathay, set up shop in Singapore, bringing in various film expertise from Shanghai and India, exhibiting and distributing films from across the world. In 1947, Shaw Brothers set up Malay Film Productions (MFP) and in 1953, the Cathay-Keris Film Organization was formed. The years between 1947 and 1972 are regularly described as Singapore cinema's

‘golden age’ since approximately 300 films were produced, of which about 280 were made by the MFP and Cathay-Keris (Millet 2006, 67). Most of the films made before 1972, as Jan Uhde and Yvonne Ng Uhde (2010, 3) note, were made in the Malay language and “focused on Malay subjects, reflecting Malay history, autochthonous values, traditions, customs, costumes, and a unique and robust cultural identity.” These films were in turn distributed to the wider region and beyond, fostering a certain kind of Malay imagination in the transnational Malay Archipelago.

In 1957, Run Run Shaw moved to Hong Kong from Singapore and, using the knowledge gained from his film work in Singapore, re-established the struggling Tianyi Film Company into Shaw Brothers, which became the biggest film company in Hong Kong. Likewise, Cathay, which was also producing films in Hong Kong, played an important part in helping set up the Golden Harvest studio in Hong Kong in the early 1970s (Uhde and Uhde 2010, 11). In turn, both Shaw Brothers and Golden Harvest played an instrumental role in propelling the Hong Kong film industry to become one of the biggest in the world. Around the same period, Malay-language film production in Singapore started to decline from about 1963, when Singapore merged with Malaya. P. Ramlee, the period’s most prolific actor and filmmaker, left Singapore for Kuala Lumpur in 1964, and the distribution and exhibition profits of both the MFP and Cathay-Keris took a huge hit during the *Konfrontasi*. In 1967, the MFP closed, and Cathay-Keris soon followed suit in 1972.

Filmmaking in Singapore underwent a notable lull from 1972 onwards, with only a few films made sporadically. It was with the production of *Mee Pok Man* (E. Khoo, 1995, Singapore) that the local filmmaking industry began to regain its momentum. Films made in Singapore after 1995, unlike during the golden age, were predominantly in Chinese languages (skewed towards Mandarin); in large part, this shift in linguistic focus is in tandem with Singapore’s language policies as discussed, where the nation’s official language, Malay, is not spoken by the majority of the people in the country. Consequently, the clear material differences between Singaporean cinema pre-1972 and post-1992 led to various critics (Berry and Farquhar 2006; O. Khoo 2006) thinking of these two periods as separate.

As I have maintained throughout, I do not view the past and the present on a linear temporal continuum but, rather, as constantly coalescing and colliding; the past is at times less visible and at times more visible, and this essay is concerned with the ways in which the relationship with language of the person living with dementia might make the past *more* visible, where language, haunted and discontinuous, becomes a charged area in which multiple transnational historical pasts *do* surface. In 3688, the presence of Malay as articulated by the

person living with dementia becomes an example in which the film raises the spectres of Singapore and Singaporean cinema's past, and the ways in which the past is entangled with the histories across a world of cinemas. The scene between Uncle Radio and the wheelchair user begins with Uncle Radio stopping outside the gates of her flat. He momentarily stares into the house in silence before asking, in Hokkien, whether the woman wants to subscribe to Rediffusion. The film cuts to the reverse shot to show the woman looking back at Uncle Radio, happily exclaiming in Hokkien that she has waited for him for an eternity and expressing how glad she is that he is finally here. Swiftly, she switches to Malay and asks her domestic helper to open the gate to let Uncle Radio in, and they then proceed to converse in various other Chinese languages.

From this quick exchange, before the film cuts to the reverse shot of the woman in the flat, Uncle Radio's facial expression lets out a tentative look of recognition – he knows her and he does not know her – and her response in Hokkien is equally ambiguously familiar. At that moment, through their dementia, a kind of hesitancy is engendered as their respective pasts are highlighted through their performances of un/familiarity with each other, and the woman's immediate instructions in Malay become layered with temporal negotiations where both characters' past experiences and linguistic competencies are brought to the fore: the use of Malay not by an ethnically Malay character but a Chinese character who lives with dementia begins to gesture towards a Singapore where the survival of Malay (and Malay-language Singaporean cinema in relation to world cinema) is acknowledged. The use of different national languages, through their haunted qualities, makes the uncanniness of temporal 'mistranslation' as manifest in dementia (and dementia narratives) even more pronounced.

As this analysis suggests, thinking more carefully about the multiple temporalities as experienced by the person living with dementia allows us to acknowledge the hesitancy and uncanniness of the coequality of past and present, as well as the multiple transnational histories of a postcolonial nation. Saër Maty Bâ and Will Higbee (2012, 8), in their essay on de-Westernising film studies, call for an approach that "is about an increasing connectivity within zones of contact always already threatening to overspill its contents (disruptions, displacements, de-homogenizations, muddy waters, and so on) into spaces beyond itself in an unpredictable fashion." In other words, to de-Westernise is to embrace and produce mess, and I have approached this essay's arguments about dementia with a similar affinity.

Dementia in/and cinema thus becomes not about issues of representation but, instead, about the ways different pasts might play a role and be made more prominent in the present. This, I suggest, requires an approach that is expansive rather than diminutive, an approach that sees the times and temporalities

of the world as entangled, as affecting and affected by multiple intersecting identifications. Two-thirds of the way into 3688, Uncle Radio sits at his desk fixing his radio as his daughter brings him a cup of water. As he fiddles with the equipment, she leans towards the radio and listens. She looks up at her father and exclaims that she can finally hear it, the Rediffusion programme that is no longer on air, and Uncle Radio leans towards the radio. Both father and daughter listen intently before he announces that he, too, can hear the transmission despite the extremely low volume of the broadcast. Satisfied, Uncle Radio announces that he has finally fixed the radio. Throughout the sequence, the radio is emphatically silent but, nonetheless, this silence – the seemingly absent – does not mean that Uncle Radio and his daughter cannot hear what is on air. In listening carefully and imaginatively, they perceive the presence of the past.

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