

The Hero's Journey as Anti-Narrative: Descent to Dissent on the way up towards Revolution and Resolution in Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* and Disney's 1950 animated *Cinderella*

There is so much meaning in an address – and, in the case of Bong Joon-ho's 2019 dark comedy sensation, *Parasite*, an IP address. The movie opens with the film's semblant protagonist, Kim Ki-woo, sitting by a carousel of drying socks in his family's half-basement apartment tapping on a smartphone which is useless insofar as Ki-woo cannot hop onto "iptime," the WiFi network of the lady upstairs because she put a password on it. The family's patriarch, Kim Ki-taek, prompted by his wife, Kim Chung-sook to find a solution to their connectivity issue asks him, "What's your plan?" ("Parasite" 00:02:42-45). Ki-taek wakes up from a nap and navigates to the kitchen where he provides sage instruction to Ki-woo while eating moldy bread: "For WiFi, hold it high. Stick it (meaning the smartphone) in every corner and so on" ("Parasite" 00:02:49-57). The urgency of locating a reliable WiFi network soon becomes clear: Chung-sook is expecting a message via WhatsApp from Pizza Generation for an offer of work, an opportunity to make some money and fill the fridge, even if it's a piece rate job folding pizza boxes. Ki-woo and his sister, Ki-jung, finally end up locating a viable signal called "coffeeland 2G" in the bathroom right next to the toilet which Bong wickedly situates "upstairs;" that is, on a platform such that it occupies the highest space vertically in the half-basement apartment. Concerning the design of the narrative space in *Parasite* it's no surprise then that a January 14th, 2020 Vulture article titled Bong Joon Ho on Why He Wanted *Parasite* to End with a 'Surefire Kill' reports that Bong "has called *Parasite* his 'stairway movie.' It is an upstairs-downstairs film that explores every available rung on the ladder of class aspirationalism" (Jung). That is, the mise-en-scene of the story action in *Parasite* occurs in three dimensions though, primarily along the Y axis

signifying to the viewer that they are in the orbit of a narrative concerned with upward and downward mobility.

The hero's journey, on the other hand, described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, consists mostly of the adventurer displacing horizontally across a surface or terrain, rather than dislocating vertically in the form of ascents and/or descents which are mostly chronicled in narratives involving heaven and/or hell, respectively. To wit, Campbell identifies archetypes of motion which present in the hero's journey in the dream of an operatic artist:

It is remarkable that in this dream the basic outline of the universal mythological formula of the adventure of the hero is reproduced, to the detail. These deeply significant motifs of the perils, obstacles, and good fortunes of the way, we shall find inflected through the following pages in a hundred forms. The crossing first of the open sewer, then of the perfectly clear river flowing over grass, the appearance of the willing helper at the critical moment, and the high, firm ground beyond the final stream (the Earthly Paradise, the Land over Jordan): these are the everlastingly recurrent themes of the wonderful song of the soul's high adventure (Campbell, 16).

The hero's movement adduced by the topographical modifiers "crossing," "over grass," and "Land over Jordan" suggest horizontal vectors over a surface as constitutive of the kinesthetic form of the journey. This observation is supported in Campbell's naming of the adventure's macro-phases, "departure" and "return" which imply a departure from some place and a return to some place along an X axis. Also apropos are the hero events "The Crossing of the First Threshold" and "The Crossing of the Return Threshold." It is interesting to note that the horizontal orientation preferred by Campbell, or, perhaps, the one he unconsciously propagates in his text, aligns with the psychic migration of the adventurer from "the external to the internal world" (Campbell, 12) in order "to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects to those causal zones of the psyche where the difficulties reside, and there to clarify the difficulties" (Campbell, 12) and "eradicate them in his own case..." (Campbell, 12). That is, the journey inwards undertaken by the hero towards the neurotic binding of his infantile cathexes is one that

though narrative becomes externally manifest as his motion over a surface to “undertake the difficult, dangerous task of self-discovery and self-development” (Campbell, 17) which, as an experience, is awesome for the individual adventurer, the rare intrepid dreamer who “crosses to the other shore” (Campbell, 17) but what about the rest of us?

Thankfully, Campbell articulates a “second solemn task” (Campbell, 15) for the hero which in fulfillment of the obligations of the adventure requires him to make his way home and share with the community he left behind the lessons he has learned outbound and back again; that said, Campbell does suggest that this “after-task” might be more daunting for the hero than the journey itself for as Campbell asks, “how communicate to people who insist on the exclusive evidence of their senses the message of the all-generating void?”(Campbell, 189). Fortunately, language and narrative enable the creation of two types of scaffolded representations of the journey for the “the multitude of men and women” (Campbell, 17) who “choose the less adventurous way of the comparatively unconscious civic and tribal routines” (Campbell, 17). On the one hand, a community creates mythologies to dramatize the events experienced by the hero which can then be preserved and transmitted in the oral and written histories of that community. Campbell states:

Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamics of the psyche. But in the dream the forms are quirked by the peculiar troubles of the dreamer, whereas in myth the problems and solutions shown are directly valid for all mankind (Campbell, 14).

On the other hand, it is also through ritual that a community has the potential to enact the events experienced by the hero along the journey; that is, “by virtue of the inherited symbolic aids of society, the rites of passage, the grace-yielding sacraments, given to mankind of old by the redeemers and handed down through millennia” (Campbell, 17). Ritual, in particular, which Campbell identifies as “ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.” (Campbell,

6) are critical to “conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also unconscious life” (Campbell, 6). There is no doubt that Campbell’s intent in describing the hero’s journey in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is to identify the phases of the adventure for the individual; of equal importance, however, is that the represented forms of the journey, in myth and in ritual, enable “not only the candidate but also every member of his circle” (Campbell, 6) to be “reborn” – such that “society is reborn” (Campbell, 6).

That a community, or a civilization, can be according to Campbell “reborn” implies necessarily that the same can die, though, Campbell is not much concerned with illustrating the specific set of conditions which might result in the decline of a community and/or a decree of civilization death – its “end times.” Campbell’s writing generally lists towards death¹ only to set the *mise-en-scene* for rebirth. Rather, in order to describe the phases of the journey, not just for the hero, but for an entire community or a civilization which is informed by the recognition that the social dynamic organizing the relationship of its constituents must necessarily shape its shared communal narrative, we turn to French Marxist, Louis Althusser who in writing *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* some 15 years after *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was written by Campbell provides a tantalizing framework for describing the journey not only for the individual worker, or worker-hero, but also for the collective, i.e. the proletariat, who is established by Marx as the protagonist of history par excellence. Althusser’s thesis begins by swapping out community or society for what Marx calls the social formation which Althusser defines as a “‘concrete society’ that has historical existence and is individualized, so that it is distinct from other societies contemporaneous with it, and is also distinct from its own past, by

¹ Indeed, Campbell often engages the euphemism of “sleep” as a proxy for death.

virtue of the mode of production dominant in it” (Althusser, 19). Writing in France in the wake of the protests of May 1968, Althusser adduces that the operative social formation is specifically the capitalist social formation and “dominant in it” is the capitalist mode of production where the social formation is fundamentally characterized by “working class struggles against the capitalist bourgeoisie” (Althusser, 5) and that “these capitalist relations of production...are, at the same time relations of capitalist exploitation” (Althusser, 154). Though Althusser concedes in a footnote that “one cannot discount the possibility that certain social formations have disappeared in history” (Althusser, 149), essentially, that civilizations have died, as a Marxist, he does not posit “death” per se as a possible outcome for the capitalist social formation. Rather, Althusser imagines a transitional phase of capitalism to socialism which he believes at the time of writing *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* is already taking place:

We are entering an age that will see the triumph of socialism across the globe. We need only take note of the irresistible course of popular struggles in order to conclude that in a relatively near future, despite all the possible twists and turns, the very serious crisis of the international movement included, the revolution is already on the agenda (Althusser, 6).

It is interesting to note that Althusser employs rhetoric specific to narrative characterizing the difficult advance of an agent over a terrain to make a descriptive claim about the political climate of his time; his phrasing “despite all the possible twists and turns” echoes unequivocally Campbell’s language when he describes the hero’s journey as a “unique, unpredictable, and dangerous adventure” (Campbell, 8). Different, however, is the ideal resolution of the narrative of the collective, the ideal “happy ending” for the “international movement” of the worker-heroes of history which, for Althusser, can only be revolution.

If the goal of the worker-hero exploited by the capitalist mode of production is revolution which according to Althusser would put an end to the capitalist social formation through the

elimination, above all, of ownership, not only of actual property, i.e. the means of production legally held by the capitalist bourgeoisie, but also, more radically, the eradication of the very notion of property as a category of meaning, one can infer, then, that the representative of the dominant class(es) who holds power in the capitalist social formation would, on the contrary, seek to maintain the status quo in the present and for generations to come. In order to reproduce the capitalist mode of production the representative of the dominant class extorts the surplus value produced by the worker-hero (where the value of his labor is not equal to the wage that he earns) and allocates it to “renewing the means of production” (Althusser, 28). The portion of surplus value tendered to the worker-hero as wages is just enough so that he may “live and reproduce” (Althusser, 28) – that is reproduce more worker-heroes in the form of his children for the dominant class to exploit within the capitalist mode of production. (One can appreciate here that if workers stopped having children, capitalism would very likely grind to a halt in the same way that it can under the synchronic conditions of a strike.) Stated in this way one understands Marx’s urgency to describe the Sisyphean underpinnings of the capitalist mode of production and Althusser’s mandate to restate them given the civil unrest of his time which Althusser described as an “ideological revolt of the masses of young people in the school system” (Althusser, iv). In the introduction to the text French philosopher and social theorist, Jacques Bidet, states, “The spirit of May 1968 runs through the entire text, that of a May that was as much the workers' as the students', a May that witnessed the biggest strike in French history” (Althusser, xx). Bidet continues, “Althusser has his eye on 'the many young militants who have flocked or will flock' to the political struggle (p. 133). Indirectly, he is addressing them” (Althusser, xx).

Why would Althusser be addressing them, “the many young militants?” Why would Althusser direct his exegesis of Marx and his argument about ideology in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* to university students? The principal thesis of his text is that the terrain of class struggle in any social formation occurs within what he calls the Ideological State Apparatuses. During the period in French history when the feudal aristocracy dominated the feudal social formation Althusser argues that the “number-one Ideological State Apparatus [was] the Church” (Althusser, 143). With the establishment of the “mercantile capitalist bourgeoisie” (Althusser, 143), the church, states Althusser, was replaced by the “scholastic ideological apparatus” (Althusser, 143) and more specifically, the “school-family dyad” (Althusser, 158). The advantage of the scholastic ideological apparatus for the dominant class who seeks to reproduce the capitalist relations of production is that a meta-ideology (which Althusser also calls the “state ideology”) governs the perception of school:

...as a neutral environment free of ideology (because it is . . . not religious) where teachers respectful of the 'conscience' and 'freedom' of the children entrusted to them (in complete confidence) by their 'parents' (who are free in their turn, that is, are the owners of their children) set them on the path to adult freedom, morality and responsibility by their own example, and provide them access to learning, literature, and the well-known 'emancipatory' virtues of literary or scientific humanism. (Althusser, 252)

My god, is there anything left to say about the “value” of education? Yes, and Althusser says it, “Somewhere around the age of fourteen, an enormous mass of children are dumped 'into production', to become workers or small peasants” (Althusser, 145). Though Althusser defers identifying in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* how exactly the scholastic ideological apparatus reproduces capitalist relations of exploitation by reproducing labor, i.e. creating “workers,” Althusser does state that every ideological state apparatus functions to disseminate ideology by way of “interpellation” which he also describes as “hailing” – when an individual is addressed by the ideological state apparatus as “hey, you,” the individual instantiates the

functioning of ideology in an act of recognition which creates an equivalency between the “you” hailed and the individual addressed. The individual thus interpellated is always already the subject of state ideology and of each ideological state apparatus operative within the capitalist mode of production. Returning now to the question of why Althusser would address students, the answer becomes clear: students as subjects par excellence of the scholastic ideological apparatus, are positioned at an essential inflection point ripe with revolutionary potential in a mature capitalist formation. On the one hand, students interpellated by the scholastic ideological apparatus will necessarily “go to work” because to be a “worker” within the framework of scientific humanism as ideology is “good.” And, yet, because the scholastic ideological apparatus according to Althusser is the principal nexus of the class struggle in the capitalist mode of production, I would argue that students also possess an exemplary potential to interrupt their interpellation as subjects in order to constitute themselves as agents of revolution. Though Althusser remits his analysis as noted above, I will venture three reasons: 1) as future wage-earners within the capitalist social formation students have a proximate motivation to stay their appropriation as fodder for the mercantile capitalist system which necessarily involves relations of capitalist exploitation – that they would have cause to willingly deny participating in their own exploitation and feel “good” about that; 2) as supply for future “skilled workers” (Althusser, 31) students are uniquely positioned to reject their governing role as proxies for the dominant class in the workplace; and, 3) education affords students the requisite ability to understand and play a causal role, should they choose, in the narrative of dialectical materialism described by Marx which arcs not towards the reproduction of the capitalist relations of production; but rather, consciously directs towards revolution and the liberation of all people from the demagoguery of the capitalist social formation.

It's no wonder, then, that the narrative of *Parasite* which Bong stated "explores every available rung on the ladder of class aspirationalism" (Jung) is catalyzed by Min, a university student, who delivers a scholar's rock to Ki-woo soon after the family has been paid wages by the Pizza Generation manager for their unskilled labor. Min explains that his "grandfather has collected scholar's rocks since his cadet days. Now the annex, the study, every room in the house is filled with these things" ("*Parasite*" 00:08:10-18). The first thing to note with regard to Min's explanation of the scholar's rock is that he doesn't live in a basement apartment or, at least, if he does, he has a "study." His off-hand description of the blueprint of his family's home while explaining the fact of his grandfather's overstock of scholar's rocks foreshadows the opulence of the Park house located at the top of a hill in a wealthy suburb of Seoul. The discomfort Ki-woo experiences when Min shows up with his "gift" is palpable: the half-basement apartment is a dump and Ki-woo is embarrassed by it. It, thus, makes complete sense that upon being given the scholar's rock that it completely cannibalizes Ki-woo's attention since Min says of it, "...this stone here is said to bring material wealth to families" ("*Parasite*" 00:08:18-22). I'll venture to guess that Min having read Althusser at university knows full well that the narrative about the scholar's rock constitutes a romanticized mystification of the class struggle; Ki-woo, however, uninitiated into the mechanics of interpellation and thus unable to interrupt it says of the scholar's rock, "Min, this is so metaphorical" ("*Parasite*" 00:08:24-27) which is almost the same thing as Ki-woo saying "it's a sign" but not exactly in the way de Saussure would have meant it. The scholar's rock as a metaphor is embedded in a network of signification and of ideology which hails Ki-woo as a member of the dominated class to believe in "upward mobility" as a matter of phenomenological potential. Little does Ki-woo understand that as ideology, "upward mobility" or "class aspirationalism" is a narrative mobilized by the ideological state apparatus

which is a priori structured to reproduce the priorities of the capitalist bourgeoisie to either keep Ki-woo on the rung of the class ladder that he is on or push him down even further. Only Chung-sook who says, “Food would be better” (“Parasite” 00:08:35-37) appreciates that the metaphor of the scholar’s rock in having no referent but the functioning of the ideological state apparatus itself produces as a tautology the mystification of the object and thus anticipates as a fact of its structure a failure to signify with consequence because, let’s face it, people who are hungry, including the Kim family, can’t eat rocks.

But, why would Min do this to Ki-woo? Give him hope that all that is his can be his? Well, for the very banal reason that Min is leaving the country to study abroad and he needs someone to keep an eye on his very rich girlfriend, Da-hye, which brings us to the issue of what is at stake in the capitalist mode of production, namely, property and ownership of the same. Though Althusser in describing the history of social formations makes a distinction between “the Roman slave-holding social formation” (Althusser, 19) and the “capitalist social formation” in which the “productive forces” are wage-earners who “have nothing to sell but the strength of their two hands” (Althusser, 28), his statements on ownership, in particular, suggest that the slave who is owned and the wage-earner who is not technically owned but, rather, of his own free will enters into an agreement with the agent of production to accept wages in exchange for his labor share a proximity in terms of their ability to exercise power within the social formation in which they exist. For, in a capitalist social formation not only does the capitalist bourgeoisie “own [délièrent la propriété de] the means of production before the process of production...after it, appropriate(s) its product” (Althusser, 28) so that the bourgeois capitalist is “found at both ‘ends’ of the productive process” (Althusser, 27-28). That is, within a capitalist social formation, the wage-earner has no choice but to sell his labor if he is to live and reproduce

because he neither owns the means of production nor the product which is a result of the production process and thus cannot appropriate the surplus value that he creates and return it to himself. The proximate-slave status of the wage-earner thus described by Althusser is underscored in *Parasite* when Ki-woo asks Min with regard to tutoring Da-hye, “What about your university friends? Why ask a loser like me?” (“*Parasite*” 00:09:41-47). Min responds, “Why do you think? Just the thought makes me sick. Those disgusting frat boys slaving over Da-hye? It’s revolting” (“*Parasite*” 00:09:48-58). Min spits on the ground and then continues, “When she enters university, I’ll officially ask her out. So you take care of her until then. If it’s you, I can leave in peace.” (“*Parasite*” 00:10:14-24). Ki-woo’s response to Min, quaint and steeped in the ideology of scientific humanism, is “Thanks for your trust” (“*Parasite*” 00:10:27-29). I would argue that when Min offers the tutoring job to Ki-woo, his proposition to him is as an employer to an employee rather than a contract of “trust” agreed upon between equals. Min asks Ki-woo to act as his proxy in his absence precisely because Ki-woo who does not belong to his social stratum, namely, the dominant class of the capitalist social formation, can thus never actually be his proxy. In addition, an application of an extension of Althusser’s framework of bourgeois capitalism illuminates the gendered dynamic of ownership, one which establishes Da-hye, the girlfriend to be taken care of, as the equivalent of real-estate, property that Min eventually seeks to own when upon his return he will “officially ask her out.” The effect of the exchange between Min and Ki-woo is fundamentally transactional: Min asks Ki-woo to house-sit Da-hye while he is away and for his labor which he has no choice but to sell given that the Kim family is destitute, Ki-woo, who is not yet quite a slave only because at this point in *Parasite* he still subscribes to the enlightenment fiction of his and Min’s equality evidenced by his use of the word “trust,” will be compensated with a wage not for his labor but rather, for his willing

interpellation by the narrative of upward mobility, an ideology which assures the position of the dominant class and secures his disenfranchisement.

Quoting Marx, Althusser's text states, "(... 'society is not made up of individuals', but of classes confronting each other in the class struggle);" (Althusser, 223-224); or, in the case of *Parasite* which dramatizes the class struggle in the capitalist social formation as a microcosm, it is represented as a violent confrontation between families. All four members of the Kim family find employment in the Park family household just before the midpoint of the film. Ki-woo succeeds in getting himself hired as Da-hye's tutor using a counterfeit university degree forged by his sister, Kim Ki-jung; Ki-jung, posturing as Jessica with an art therapy degree from Chicago talks her way into becoming an art therapist for the Park's young scion, Da-song; the father, Ki-taek, gets work as the Park patriarch's driver; and finally, the mother, Choong-sook replaces the housekeeper, Moon-gwang, who was first employed by the previous owners of the house, and thus, functions as an extension of it. That is, the kin of Kim, representing the nuclear family, become co-workers in the employ of the Park family. The Park family has no clue ever that the four people working for them are related and that they don't submit an alternate formulation of the class struggle: if, indeed, as Marx claims that "society is not made of individuals," the dynamic established in *Parasite* between the Park family and the Kim family strongly suggests, instead, that the family constitutes the smallest unit of exploitation in the capitalist mode of production. This is a somewhat radical thesis to advance only because post-enlightenment constructs of public and private postulate that the family, discursively defined as "private," would not necessarily constitute the indivisible morpheme of the workers' movement and, later, revolution; but, the family, revealed to be, in the first instance, the unit of reproduction for a mode of production that seeks to reproduce itself is, in fact, the primary revelation in *Parasite*

where reproduction of the family unit (parents reproduce themselves as wage-earners by producing children) reproduces labor as an indispensable component of the capitalist mode of production because it is only through the exploitation of labor that surplus value can be created and appropriated by the dominant class to reproduce the capitalist social formation. This dynamic is ironically articulated by Ki-taek in the half-basement at the end of the work-day when he says to his family: “In an age like ours, when an opening for a security guard attracts 500 university graduates. Our entire family got hired!” (“Parasite” 00:53:05-15) and “If we put our 4 salaries together? The amount of cash coming from that house into ours is immense” (“Parasite” 00:53:18-21). As already stated, it doesn’t occur to Ki-taek that the Park family is appropriating the surplus value he and his family create and using it to reproduce their own material advantage which locates the Park family in a boutique suburban mansion and the Kim family in a half-basement apartment. Here we see ideology deployed through the ideological state apparatus functioning at its finest. Danger to the seamless operation of ideology only emerges later when the signal of interpellation broadcast by the ideological state apparatus glitches: in the absence of the Park family who have gone camping in the rain, Ki-woo, along with his sister, mother and father occupies the Park living room, drinking their liquor and eating their snacks; inebriated on spirits owned by the bourgeoisie, Ki-woo imagines a strategy to extend forever the time-delimited fantasy of the Kim family’s fortuitous but temporary living-room occupation by re-stating to them what Min said to him about Da-hye, “When she enters university, I’ll officially ask her out. Seriously” (“Parasite” 00:59:00-05). I will note here that while Ki-taek, the father, seems satisfied with the capital transfer resulting from the Kim family’s employment in the Park household which assures the stability of the capitalist social formation, for Ki-woo, to be a wage-earner is simply not enough compensation for what he is

coming to understand is his own entrenched disenfranchisement in the capitalist mode of production.

Ki-woo's fantasy of upward mobility relayed through the romantic-partnership-as-real-estate framework is modeled on another character whose class aspiration is also facilitated through a time-delimited fantasy but to better results, namely, Cinderella. An unidentified voice-over in the 1950 Disney version of the fairytale narrates Cinderella's personal misfortune which is aligned with a narration describing the decay of her family home after the death of Cinderella's father leaves her in the company of her stepmother, Lady Tremaine, and two stepsisters, Anastasia and Drizella, "Thus, as time went by the chateau fell into disrepair for the family fortunes were squandered on the vain and selfish step-sisters while Cinderella was abused, humiliated and finally forced to become a servant in her own house" ("Cinderella" 00:02:43-00:02:58) which as an outcome actually seems somewhat more undesirable than becoming servants, as the members of the Kim family do, in someone else's house. At this point the camera rises vertically to locate the attic in the tower of the chateau to which Cinderella has been banished by Lady Tremaine. As the sun rises illuminating the window of Cinderella's tower abode, the voice-over continues, "And, yet, through it all, Cinderella remained ever gentle and kind for with each dawn she found hope that someday her dreams of happiness would come true" ("Cinderella" 00:03:00-00:03:12) which, translated, means Cinderella does not plot to effect the proletarian revolution because she believes, or knows to be true, that the prospect of upward mobility will eventually materialize, literally, and she will be delivered from servitude. Indeed, Cinderella's "hope" manifests in the narrative not as a scholar's rock but as wardrobe, namely, the glass slipper which after the fantasy of her encounter with the prince is dispelled she keeps in her apron pocket so that it can function at the resolution as a catalyst of her liberation. It is

interesting to consider, given that Cinderella succeeds in her class ambition, that the fairytale as a narrative form functions as an affirmative signifier within the cultural ideological apparatus which endorses upward mobility as a material reality for the dominated class within the capitalist social formation. Indeed, the functioning of ideology in Cinderella is articulated with unnerving efficiency through the motif of the striking clock: it not only terminates Cinderella's time-delimited fantasy at the end of the second act when the spell breaks, it also hails Cinderella to work at the beginning of the film. Of it, she laments, "Oh, that clock. Old killjoy. I hear you. 'Come on, get up,' you say. Time to start another day. Even he orders me around. Well, there's one thing. They can't order me to stop dreaming" ("Cinderella" 00:05:29-00:05:50). We all know what Althusser would say to this: "they" don't want you to stop dreaming. This theoretical position prompts the following question: if the positive narrative representation of social aspiration in Cinderella interpellates the wage-earner within the capitalist social formation as a potential future capitalist, does a narrative of failure like Parasite functioning potentially as an extra-ideological cultural artifact create the possibility for the wage-earner to break free of the ideological state apparatuses which reproduce his domination?

Invert the chateau in Cinderella and her attic idyll becomes the Park family home's basement's basement or bunker where Moon-gwang has been hiding her husband, Geun-se, for four years from loan sharks. That is, an ascent to servitude in Cinderella becomes a descent to bondage in Parasite; up or down, though, the vertical displacements in both films are visually shepherded by stairs and staircases. That Cinderella and Geun-se occupy parallel narrative spaces, attic and bunker, respectively, suggests that he and not Ki-woo represents the Cinderella archetype in Parasite. A re-framing of the film's narrative structure provides insight: in Cinderella, the eponymous character, a servant in her own home, is able to effectuate her social

ascent, rising vertically past her stepsisters with whom she is in competition to attain the highest status within Cinderella's narrative world, namely, the one found at the bottom of the stairs in her father's living room where Cinderella produces for the Prince's representative the remaining glass slipper. In Parasite the dynamic is similar: the Kim family and the couple, Moon-gwang and Geun-se, exist as parallels to Cinderella and her stepsisters insofar as the two family units are also in competition with each other for the boon of employment which the Park family has the economic power to bestow because they have the resources to pay wages. When Chung-sook discovers that Moon-gwang is hiding Geun-se in the bunker, she says, "But, now that I know, I have no choice but to call the police" ("Parasite" 01:09:53-57). Moon-gwang immediately throws herself at Chung-sook's feet and begs for mercy, "No, please, sis! As fellow members of the needy, please don't." ("Parasite" 01:09:59-10:02). Chung-sook's responds, "I'm not needy" ("Parasite" 01:10:03-04). To this, Moon-gwang cries, "But, we're needy. We've no house, no money, only debts. Sis, please! Even after 4 years of hiding these debt collectors won't give up. They're still searching for him, threatening to stab him" ("Parasite" 01:10:04-23). The moment reveals unequivocally the structured mobilization of the bourgeoisie against the dominated classes in its deployment of the ideological state apparatus(es) while the representative of the dominant class, namely the Park family unit, is not there. In his discussion "On the reproduction of Capitalism," Althusser elaborates on what he describes as the social division of labor which is:

An effect of the distribution of individuals in classes, culminates in a double, joint line of demarcation, in the enterprise itself, between a monopoly on certain jobs (associated with certain kinds of 'knowledge') reserved for one part of the 'personnel', and the 'penning' of another part of the 'personnel', the workers, in subaltern jobs (plus a prohibition on 'knowing'. (Althusser, 41)

That is, the bourgeois capitalist social formation assures its dominance over the working class(es) by perpetrating disunity among them as an effect of the ideological state apparatus(es).

Ideology reproduces the structure of the capitalist social formation within the working class through the social division of labor which distributes wage-earners into those who “perform functions of repression;” those who perform “functions of exploitation,” and, those who perform the “functions of production...the proletarians in the strict sense” (Althusser, 41). When Chung-sook threatens to call the police on Moon-gwang and Guen-se, the ideological state apparatus interpellates her as an agent of the bourgeoisie empowered to execute its interests which in the moment she takes out her phone she also believes are her own; that is, as a temporary and context-dependent representative of the dominant class performing a function of repression (police are considered part of the Repressive State Apparatus in Althusser’s model), Chung-sook has power over Moon-gwang and Guen-se where “power is to be understood” as Bidet states in his introduction to Althusser’s text “...as the ‘excess’ of this class’s force over that of the dominated class...” (Althusser, xxii). Moments later, however, after a pratfall on the stairs involving the other three Kims Moon-gwang records Ki-woo calling Ki-taek “father” with her smartphone, thus memorializing the Kim family fraud for the Park family to discover whenever Moon-gwang feels like hitting “send.” This comically flips the power dynamic in an instant where Moon-gwang uses her phone like a gun forcing the Kim family to kneel in the living room with their hands up. The internecine class struggle between the working-class family units in which power is mediated through the revelation of fraud (each family has something to hide) is arrested, however, when Yeon-kyo, the Park matriarch, calls Chung-sook unexpectedly and tells her that they are returning home from their rained-out camping trip and will arrive in “8 minutes, according to the GPS” (“Parasite” 01:16:56-58). In other words, 8 minutes until the clock strikes 12 at which point the time-delimited fantasy in which the dominated classes get to struggle over the opportunity to impersonate the dominant class in its absence will be over.

The double-basement structure in *Parasite* visually metaphorizes the division of the working class effected by the social division of labor which acts as an impediment to Marx's vision of a unified proletariat whose members in identifying with each other have the capacity to create a working-class consciousness, a necessary component for engaging in revolution. That said, I would argue that revolution does occur in *Parasite* though not in a way that either Marx or Althusser specifically envisions or would consider ideal for the end of history. After rain deluges the city flooding the Kim's basement apartment with sewer water and forcing Ki-taek, Ki-woo and Ki-jung to spend the night in a gym with the city's displaced inhabitants, the Kim family is summoned to the Park house which has been unaffected by the rain in order to work the next morning for Da-Song's birthday. Chung-sook sets up garden tables for a lawn party; Ki-taek follows Yeon-kyo through a grocery store with a cart while she purchases wine and crustaceans; Ki-woo arrives carrying the scholar's rock. Standing with Da-Hye in her second story room watching the gathering of "gorgeous," "cool" and "natural" ("*Parasite*" 01:46:31-41) people who all belong to the Park family social stratum transpire below, Ki-woo asks Da-Hye, "Do I fit in here?" ("*Parasite*" 01:46:48-50) Da-Hye who really just wants to make out with her tutor nods without commitment. Hiding in the bushes below, Dong-ik, the Park patriarch, and Ki-taek, his employee, are dressed up as Native Americans with feather headdresses and play tomahawks. Dong-ik explains the plan, "...the concept is very simple. There'll be a parade with Jessica carrying a birthday cake. Then we jump out and attack Jessica. Swinging our tomahawks!" ("*Parasite*" 01:47:45-57). Ki-taek says, "Right" ("*Parasite*" 01:47:58-58). Dong-ik continues, "Just then, Da-Song the good Indian will jump out and we'll do battle. Finally, he'll save Jessica the cake princess and they'll all cheer" ("*Parasite*" 01:47:59-48:09). Returning to Campbell, it's interesting to note that Dong-ik articulates the narrative of Da-song's birthday – his "ceremonial

of birth” and “rite of passage” – in terms of the hero’s journey which sees Da-song engage the hero-events, Atonement with the Father and Rescue from Without, among others. The ritualized saving of Jessica functions to interpellate Da-song as the hero and is, thus, precisely what allows not only Da-song as the individual adventurer to be reborn, but for “society” itself to be reborn; or, in the language of Althusser, the birthday party as a ritual action and rite of passage, deploys the hero’s journey as an instantiation of ideology to reproduce the capitalist social formation. To effect an interruption of the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production requires of the hero, according to Marx and Althusser, something quite beyond what Campbell manifestly articulates about the journey in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Althusser states:

...that without the seizure of state power, without a dismantling of the Repressive State Apparatus (what Marx and Lenin called 'smashing the machine of the bourgeois state'), without a long struggle to smash the bourgeois Ideological State Apparatuses, revolution is unthinkable, or can only triumph for a time... (Althusser, 109).

If Ki-woo represents a benign instantiation of the archetype of Cinderella, then Geun-se personifies her militant expression interpellated not by the narrative form of the fairytale Cinderella but rather by “proletarian ideology (above all political, but also moral) that has been transformed by the persevering educational activity of the Marxist-Leninist science of the capitalist mode of production, and thus of capitalist social formations, and thus of the revolutionary class struggle and socialist revolution” (Althusser, 181). Geun-se makes his final first ascent from the bunker to the basement where he smashes Ki-woo in the head with the scholar’s rock. This is no surprise since Ki-woo in failing to understand the rock as a signifier of his own subscription to the fiction of upward mobility; and blinded to the functioning of the rock as a metonym of his own exploitation in the capitalist social formation establishes himself as an agent of the bourgeois state and an enemy of the revolution. Geun-se’s final second ascent surfaces him from the basement to the garden party right before the ritual narrative of Da-song’s

hero adventure has begun; holding a kitchen knife Geun-se goes straight for Jessica and stabs her in the chest. With regard to strategies of revolution involving violence, Althusser states:

Under these conditions, communists are right to talk about their party as a 'party of a new kind', completely different from bourgeois parties, and about themselves as 'militants of a new kind', completely different from bourgeois politicians. Their political practice - illegal or legal, parliamentary or 'extra-parliamentary' - has nothing to do with bourgeois political practice" (Althusser, 227).

By "conditions" Althusser is referring to the ideological state apparatuses where "ideology is eternal" (Althusser, 192) and "individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects" (Althusser, 192). In assaulting Ki-woo and Ki-jung who are both reproduced wage-earners within the Kim family, I would argue that Geun-se interrupts the potential of the Kim family unit, at the very least, to be enjoined in the reproduction of the capitalist social formation; and, given Althusser's all-encompassing vision of the functioning of ideology which can only produce an apotheosis of the class struggle through escalating violence, labor evacuating labor through murder could be construed as a nihilistic advancing of the revolutionary agenda precisely because it dramatizes the only means to an extra-ideological existence. It is also interesting to consider in this context that Geun-se's attack on Jessica stages as a localized action the "smashing" of the bourgeois machine where Jessica represents not only the reproduced wage earner but also the money-lenders, the dominant class who own the means of production, who would "threaten to stab" Geun-se were he to be found, the implication being that 1) any action taken by a worker (an individual who does not own the means of production) which violates the rules governing the capitalist social formation, both legal and illegal expressions of its structure, is subject to the repressive state apparatus either as prison or as an extra-legal death; and, 2) the only strategy available to the worker in dismantling not only the repressive state apparatus but the ideological state apparatus(es) which reproduce the capitalist social formation is extra-legal

action because any action which exists within the framework of the law must necessarily support the capitalist social formation and relations of capitalist exploitation. That is, ideology makes it almost impossible to conceive of revolution without “smashing.”

That said, *Parasite*'s violent resolution neither conceives of the end of history as the hero's “return to the normal world” (Campbell, 6) nor as revolution which would lead to a “classless society when all the members of a social formation are agents of production” (Althusser, 27). Rather, it offers an instantiation of anti-narrative where change over time occurs, though, the outcome of that change is ostensibly more of the same. As Ki-taek is tending to Jessica bleeding out on the grass, Dong-ik tells him to “Get the car. Mr. Kim! What are you doing?” (“*Parasite*” 01:54:32-34). As a request it doesn't seem unreasonable since Da-song needs to be transported to the hospital and Dong-ik has no idea that “Jessica” is “Mr. Kim's” daughter. It is interesting to note that Ki-taek does not respond to being interpellated by Dong-ik as “Mr. Kim, the Driver.” Rather, Ki-jung interpellates Ki-taek as her father when she says, “Stop pushing, Dad. Makes it hurts more” (“*Parasite*” 01:54:38-43). That the state ideological apparatus represented by Dong-ik and the family ideological apparatus represented by Ki-jung are in conflict for Ki-taek at this moment (should he stay or should he go) is described by Althusser when he states, “... the dominant ideology can never completely resolve its own contradictions, which are a reflection of the class struggle – although its function is to resolve them” (Althusser, 220). Earlier in the movie Ki-taek, Ki-woo and Ki-jung hide under the living room table while Dong-ik and Yeon-kyo prepare to sleep on the couch. (In sync with the vertical visual thematics of *Parasite* the camera descends from the couch to floor to find the Kim family hiding underneath the living room table.) Dong-ik asks Yeon-kyo, “Where's that smell coming from?” (“*Parasite*” 01:27:50-53). Yeon-kyo responds, “What smell?” (“*Parasite*” 01:27:53-54).

Dong-ik says, “Mr. Kim’s smell” (“Parasite” 01:27:56-57). Dong-ik continues, “That smell that wafts through a car. You know when you boil a rag? It smells like that. Anyway, even though he always seems about to cross the line, he never does cross it. That’s good. But, that smell crosses the line” (“Parasite” 01:28:05-34). The camera cuts to Ki-taek smelling his shirt while in earshot of Dong-ik’s comments. Returning to the party we see Ki-taek throw the car keys towards Dong-ik. Where they land in the grass establishes the boundary between the dominated class and the dominant class in the capitalist social formation. When Dong-ik goes to retrieve the keys, he suddenly pinches his nose as if to signify in *Parasite* that no apparent breakdown of the capitalist social formation as dramatized in the party scene gone amok can, in fact, dismantle it. The “smell” representing “the pitiless line of class demarcation” (Althusser, 37) in the capitalist socialist formation endures through the functioning of ideology ensuring the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and bourgeois dominance. Even when Ki-taek picks up the knife that Guen-se used to kill Ki-jung and finally crosses the line of his own exploitation represented by his “smell,” stabbing Dong-ik to death, not even Ki-taek’s annihilation of the dominant “father,” can liberate either Ki-taek himself nor the members of his family from forever being wage-earners and, to each other, co-workers, in the first instance. I suggest at the beginning of this inquiry that Ki-woo is the protagonist of *Parasite* – that, like Cinderella, *Parasite* is a story of upward and downward mobility. This is not quite accurate, however. Rather, Ki-woo representing the benign archetype of Cinderella and whose social position does not change at the end of the film conceives of *Parasite*, on the one hand, as a narrative of static mobility. Indeed, the dramatization of Ki-woo’s “Cinderella” resolution in the penultimate sequence of *Parasite* – the one in which Ki-woo dressed in a really nice suit makes enough money to buy the Park home where his father, a criminal and fugitive from the law for the murder of Dong-ik, hides in the

bunker – constitutes Campbell’s hero-task fulfilled where the son successfully materializes his dream of upward mobility in order to liberate his father from the bondage of his status as a perpetual wage-earner in the capitalist social formation. That Ki-woo fails to realize the mise-en-scene of his class aspirationalism and ends up in the final frame of Parasite exactly where he started is contrasted with Ki-taek’s successful embrace of captivity which sees him downwardly mobile, an agent of change, from half-basement apartment to bunker establishing him as Parasite’s protagonist, though the implications of this reading given Althusser’s heuristic presents a complete inversion and, perhaps, perversion of the hero’s journey as a model for narrative and narrative meaning. Ki-taek’s extra-legal existence, in which he is forever fettered to the potential consequences of his crime, constitutes a type of radical liberation from interpellation by the ideological state apparatus(es). This is confirmed in Parasite’s final sequences where Ki-taek uses the light in the hallway of the Park house to tap out a message to Ki-woo in morse code who receives it while sitting on the hill next to the house. Ki-taek interpellates Ki-woo as ‘Son!’ (“Parasite” 02:00:50-51). Ki-woo responds by writing his own letter which begins, “Dad, today I made a plan” (“Parasite” 02:05:06-10). Ki-woo interpellates Ki-taek as his father but he has no way of getting his message to him. There exists no possibility for bi-directional communication. Ki-taek has, in the end, as an act of revolution at the resolution of Parasite, created the conditions for his inability to be hailed by the ideological state apparatus(es), including the family ideological apparatus. One can argue that Ki-taek in pursuing a journey towards anti-narrative and of anti-narrative is representative of the ultimate revolutionary because as an individual he no longer exists to be interpellated, not even by his own son, which is, perhaps, preferable to no longer existing. Ki-woo understands this as well, that his narrative of static mobility is nested not within his father’s narrative of downward

mobility but rather in Ki-taek's anti-narrative when in his final appearance on screen Ki-woo breaks the fourth wall and says, "So long," ("Parasite" 02:07:31-35) not to his father, but to the viewer.

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